

JEWISH AFFAIRS

Chanukah 2012



**Price R50,00
incl. VAT
Registered at the GPO
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ISSN 0021 • 6313



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JEWISH AFFAIRS

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JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

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TYPESETTING/PRINTING – Bookpress, Johannesburg

© South African Jewish Board of Deputies 2011

Permission to reprint material from JEWISH AFFAIRS should be applied for from

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies

JEWISH AFFAIRS is published 3 times annually

Annual subscription R180 including VAT and postage

Overseas: Surface Mail US\$30 or BPS25

Air Mail US\$70 or BPS50

Postal Address: PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041

Original, unpublished essays of between 1 000 and 6 000 words on all subjects are invited, and should be sent to:

The Editor, JEWISH AFFAIRS, PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041,
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JEWISH AFFAIRS

VOL. 67 ♦ NO. 3 ♦ CHANUKAH 2012

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LIES, DELUSIONS AND THE JEWS

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Chuck Volpe

"Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K. He knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested." So begins Franz Kafka's classic novel *The Trial*. The strange sense of guiltless guilt and injustice which pervades this novel could well describe the Jewish experience over the last 2000 years. Jews, living as a minority in often resentful host communities, have frequently been the target of unfounded suspicion and false accusations. For a large part of their history they have been, so to speak, 'in the dock', as defendants facing charges they could sometimes not make sense of. 'Sufferance', says Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, 'is the badge of our tribe.'

Even the promise of messianic redemption did not remove the ever-present dread of what came to be called antisemitism and its effect on Jews. This factor is central to understanding Jews and Israel. To disregard antisemitism in the study of Jews would be like overlooking race in studying South African politics.

Antisemitism is painful and it is understandable that Jews are disinclined to revisit it. In his book *The Jewish State* Theodor Herzl comments wearily that "Everything rational and everything sentimental that can possibly be said in defence [of the Jews] has been said already." Nevertheless, antisemitism has again surfaced in world politics and we have no choice but to confront it. Once again, it is not content just to stigmatize Jews; it wants to wipe them out.

Jews are survivors and they are smart, but their suffering has at times distorted clear thinking. I want to look at some these distortions or what I will call 'delusions.' Delusions are "ideas or beliefs which are held despite being contradicted by reality." Sometimes, these beliefs are simply mistaken but quite often they take the form of a defence against reality, a form of self-deception.

I use the term 'self-deception' not as a moral judgement but to describe a natural human predisposition. We deceive ourselves in matters small - our looks, our children's brilliance, and in matters large - our faultless ethics and our religious beliefs; and in the face of danger we often deceive ourselves with unrealistic hopes. The most poignant example of this played out in Europe in the late 1930s, when misplaced hope occluded the

disaster that lay just ahead. Since antisemitism in all its forms threatens Jews and can lead to distortions in thinking, it will be helpful to look at its nature and characteristics.

The history of antisemitism is not a concatenation of isolated events or separate episodes. Over time, antisemitism builds upon itself, creating what has become a mythology surrounding Jews. Jews are easily the most mythologised people on the planet, accredited with the most extraordinary characteristics and powers, and it is this mythology, rather than their considerable achievements, that has given Jews such a central place in modern history.

The question 'why the Jews?' has a simple answer. They are a tiny and vulnerable people. Generally speaking, the antisemite knows this and believes that he can say and do what he wants and get away with it. As an ideology, antisemitism is intellectually feeble, unlike communism, for example, which had enormous intellectual backing through Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky and others. August Bebel called antisemitism the 'the socialism of fools' and recently the UK academic David Hirsh has termed it 'the anti-imperialism fools', in reference to its strong support by the ideological left.

Antisemitism's essence is the lie and the more defamatory and extravagant the lie, the better. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler spoke for all antisemites when he coined the expression *der Große Lüge* - the Big Lie. He made the credible claim that the more gigantic and bizarre the lie, the more likely it is to be believed. He based this on the common sense assumption that where there is smoke, there is a fire, and therefore the more smoke, the more likely the fire. He went on to accuse Jews, among other things, of responsibility for the French revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Great Depression, Capitalism and Communism together, and polluting the Aryan race.

In earlier times, the 'big lie' took different forms such as the murder of God, using the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes, and causing the Black Plague, to mention just a few. The sheer variety of accusations points to another characteristic - antisemitism's virus-like ability to change frequently and easily according to need and circumstance. The charge of God-murder met the needs of the Church, the invention of Capitalism the needs of the Communists, the invention of Communism suited Capitalists like Henry Ford, and the charge of colonialism and ethnic cleansing fits the requirements of the ideological Left today. Each group creates its

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own mythology of the Jew, in an image of its own convenience.

It is in the nature of the big lie to be unanswerable. For example, how does one respond to an accusation which is cosmic in range, such as 'you have murdered God' or 'you want to take over the world'? Or existential in nature, like 'you are the devil', or 'you are sub-human'? Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, famously said that if a theory is not falsifiable or capable of refutation, it cannot be taken seriously. For instance, if I were to make the claim that an alien race controls the United Nations, a sceptic could ask for those conditions, which, if satisfied, would refute my theory. If I cannot furnish such conditions, he would be entitled to say that I was talking nonsense.

Likewise, when the antisemite accuses the Jew of killing God or wishing to dominate the world, one can reasonably ask what evidence might count against the truth of his statements. If he cannot provide this, he would have to submit to the charge of talking nonsense. But all this is theoretical, because the antisemite is not rational. Debate is not his forte. He does not reach his conclusions by any accredited process of reasoning and so is not amenable to evidence and moral persuasion.

It is not enough that the antisemite tells lies and that he directs his lies at a vulnerable group; he also employs a devious device to make his lies stick. He uses a conjurer's trick that Ruth Wisse calls the prestidigitation of the 'pointing finger.' To illustrate this: Say, I approach a complete stranger in the street - call her Susan - and I say to her: "Susan, you are a prostitute." When she recovers from the shock, she'll surely deny the accusation. "Okay," I say, "If you deny it, let's settle the matter in a debate. I'll propose the motion and you can defend yourself."

Is this fair? Is she likely to agree? Of course not. Why? Not because she is a prostitute (which she obviously isn't) but because she has been made the victim of a trick, the 'prestidigitation of the pointing finger.' She has been put on the defensive ab initio.

This is how antisemitism works. Jews are singled out by means of the 'pointing finger' and so are damned from the start. In a debate with Ronnie Kasrils during so-called Israel Apartheid Week at the beginning of 2012, I had to contend with the topic "Is Israel an apartheid state?" The bias is obvious. I wonder whether Kasrils would have agreed to the topic title: "Is Ronnie Kasrils deluded on the subject of Israel?"

The deception of the pointing finger is remarkably effective and has the added advantage of directing attention away from the accuser's shortcomings. The Jew is put into the dock as the defendant, while the antisemite assumes the position of plaintiff, prosecutor and judge. What never ceases to amaze me is that Jews habitually fall for this trick.

Ruth Wisse defines antisemitism as the organisation of politics against the Jews. It might strike you as bizarre, but this half-baked, sub-intellectual package of lies was the most successful ideology of the 20th Century. Fascism and Communism, the two best-known ideologies, both failed. By comparison, antisemitism came within a hair's breadth of achieving its stated goal, which was to eliminate Jews and Jewish influence from Europe.

In six years, six million Jewish men, women and children were gassed, shot, starved and tortured and then reduced to ash; hundreds of Jewish communities were destroyed and the 800-year-old European Jewish civilisation was laid to waste. The Jewish population of the world is today thirteen million, still, four million short of the 1939 census. That the Nazis did not succeed entirely was due to events outside their control rather than outside their designs.

The Holocaust should not be seen as a single event perpetrated by the Germans alone. With the notable exception of Denmark and Bulgaria, the nations of Europe together perpetrated what was in reality a cluster of crimes against the Jews of Europe. The term 'Holocaust' should be understood to refer to this cluster. There were crimes of perpetration, crimes of collaboration and crimes of abandonment, and together they combined to bring about the final catastrophic result. The scale of the Holocaust could never have been as great without this being so. This has scarcely been acknowledged by Europeans, but that should not obscure it from Jewish awareness.

Furthermore, the Holocaust was not an aberration of history. One has to acknowledge that it came out of Western civilisation. This has enormous implications both for Jews and for non-Jews. Jews will forever live in its shadow, while non-Jews will need to reassess some of the basic assumptions about the civilisation to which they belong. Gyorgy Koves, the 15-year-old boy in survivor Imre Kertesz's novel *Fateless*, observes "we [Jews] can never start a new life, only ever carry on the old one". This strikes to the heart of the Jewish predicament today.

The enormous success of antisemitism did not go unnoticed. The Arab and Muslim world discovered its own uses for this foul ideology. As a dysfunctional civilisation trying to come to terms with modernity, the Arab world found this off-the-shelf panacea a godsend. Since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire almost 100 years ago the Arab Middle East has been in a state of turmoil. This is not because of Western colonialism, as the school of resentment would have you believe, but because of a decision 800 years ago in the Muslim world to abandon a burgeoning interest in science and philosophy and take refuge in fundamentalist religion. Sunni Islamic civilisation, which at the time dominated the civilised world in every sphere of learning from philosophy to mathematics, took the decision

to follow the Ash'arite school of al Ghazali and abandon the legacy of reason and science it had inherited from the ancients.

The result today is that the total GDP of the Arab league, which comprises 22 countries and 300 million people, is about the same size as that of Spain. Furthermore, the belief that the Koran contains all knowledge worth knowing has led to the embarrassing situation where more books are translated into Spanish every year than have been translated into Arabic since the time of Mohammed. One in every two Arab woman cannot read or write and ten million children do not go to school. There is not a single Arab institution in the annual ranking of the world's top universities while tiny Israel has six.

Rather than deal with this lack of development and the misery it gives rise to, the Arab world has looked for scapegoats. Western imperialism was one, but the Jews on a tiny sliver of land in the middle of the Islamic world provided a much more credible and convenient scapegoat, and a ready-made one to boot. Nazi antisemitism had already shown what could be done to this small people while the world stood by. As it happened, antisemitism was well-established in the Arab world at the time of the Second World War and Amin al Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestinian headman, spent most of the war in Berlin as the guest of Heinrich Himmler. When he wasn't touring Auschwitz or openly calling for the extermination of the Jews, he was actively helping to prosecute the Holocaust.

Jeffrey Herf and Meir Litvak, in two recently published books, explore the infusion of totalitarian ideas and antisemitic tropes into Palestinian political culture and Islamist thinking. The Hamas Charter is the best example and if further evidence is needed, the testimony in court by the planners of the 9/11 terrorist attacks should suffice. According to the testimony, New York was selected for the atrocity because the planners believed that world Jewry's plot to dominate the world emanated from there.

Led by Muslim countries, antisemitism in the West has been rekindled. By dint of numbers and their oil wealth, the Arab world managed to persuade the United Nations to implicitly revoke what they once granted, the right to a Jewish homeland. In 1975, by a vote of 72 to 35, the General Assembly adopted the outrageous resolution that "Zionism is racism." At a stroke of the pen, they delegitimised the Jewish state, and even though this resolution was later repealed, it was simultaneously reaffirmed at the Muslim summit in Dakar. Please note that this is not a statement about disputed borders or human rights; this is a statement saying that Israel as a state should not exist. Just as the Nazis undermined the legitimacy of Jews in order to harm them as they did, so have the Arabs sought to undermine the legitimacy of Israel, so as to justify any future harm they may do to them.

If Hitler taught us anything, it is this: when a Nazi or a fascist or an Islamist or an antisemite of any description, says something, believe it. Don't try and justify it or excuse it. Antisemitism is antisemitism and should always be called by its rightful name. If a newspaper publishes an antisemitic cartoon, call it antisemitic. If the attacks on the World Trade Centre were animated by antisemitic fantasies, say so. If the Iranian head of state calls for the destruction of Israel, take him at his word. If a so-called liberation movement like the PLO or Hamas or Hezbollah calls for the elimination of the Jewish state and the extermination of Jews, do not pretend that it is calling for anything else. Absence of clarity on antisemitism is the beginning of complicity.

Against this background I now want to look at six delusions.

Delusion 1: Jews underestimate their enemies

There is a minority belief that we can negotiate with the Arabs, and I use the term 'Arab' rather than 'Palestinian', because according to the polls, Palestinians regard themselves as Arab and Muslim first and then as Palestinian. The first clear indication of Arab intransigence came straight after the Six Day War. In a poll run by the Israel Institute for Applied Social Research the majority of Israelis were open to negotiation on the territories. After a victory of such decisiveness most people believed a deal could be done.

The Arabs, however, thought differently. Instead of rushing to the negotiating table, they issued the most categorical of rejections at the Arab league conference in Khartoum - No negotiation, No recognition, and No peace. This was and still is the clearest declaration of Arab and Palestinian intentions. The position of the Palestinian Authority today is not much different. They still refuse to recognise a Jewish state and will only negotiate on the precondition that Israel agrees to the return of all Palestinian refugees, notwithstanding that this would entail the end of the Jewish state. The lesson is that the Jewish state can be rejected as emphatically as a homeless tribe was once rejected.

Delusion 2: Jews underestimate the power of ideas

Given the enormous success of the Jewish idea of Zionism in bringing about a Jewish state after 2000 years, it is surprising that Israel has underestimated the corresponding power of Palestinian ideas. Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theoretician, said that war is the extension of politics, but the Arabs have taught us that politics can be the extension of war. Having failed to vanquish the Israel militarily, the Palestinians proceeded to lay siege to the fundamental idea behind the Jewish state - Zionism.

The 'Zionism is racism' resolution at the United Nations attacked the Zionist claim to a homeland with the counter-claim that this would deprive Palestinian Arabs of the right to their homeland. Even though later retracted, the resolution still forms the basis of the current BDS campaign against Israel. The Palestinian claim to the land is hammered in whenever a suicide bomber detonates himself, because the world interprets such self-sacrifice as an indication of the power and sincerity of the Palestinian claim.

The Palestinians have in effect stolen the Zionist narrative - 'homeless Palestinian' replaces 'homeless Jew', 'Palestinian suffering' replaces 'Jewish suffering', 'Palestinian racism' gives way to 'Jewish racism', and the genocide attempt by the Arabs in 1948 is replaced by an alleged 'genocide of the Palestinian people' by the Israelis. No wonder Jews are asking questions like 'Is Zionism still relevant?' Or 'Has Zionism failed?'

Delusion 3: The liberal belief that mankind is improving and justice will ultimately prevail

This delusion, probably more widespread than any other, is the optimistic liberal belief in the progressive improvement of mankind. As tempting as it may be to believe that the world is becoming more civilised and less brutal and that justice will eventually prevail, this must be the ultimate self-deception.

There is a brutal paradox at the centre of Western civilisation - between classical learning and culture as expressed in the humanities, on the one hand, and the big lie, totalitarian politics and the triumph of the death camps, on the other. We saw how men could operate a gas chamber during the day and weep over Mozart and Goethe at night over dinner. The long-standing belief that cultivation in the arts and sciences would humanise man turns out to be no more than an illusion.

The Holocaust stands in the sharpest contradiction to the idea of human progress. That it happened once increases the chances of it happening again. Rather than engendering sympathy for the Jews, Jews are now censored for their victimhood. It is the Jews that provide the mirror in which Western civilisation sees its own depravity. No one thanks them for this and for shattering their dreams of a better world.

Delusion 4: The liberal belief in a one-size-fits-all theory

No one would doubt the appeal of liberalism. The liberal believes in a rational world in which all human problems, political or otherwise, respond to reason and are resolvable by negotiation. He forswears the use of force, not only for the damage it causes, but because it stands in radical contradiction to all his other beliefs. Notwithstanding all its merits liberalism has one fatal demerit - its inability to deal with

political intransigence and intractable hatred - the characteristics of the totalitarian.

His problem lies in his one-size-fits-all political theory. This blinds him to the obvious fact that people and cultures differ. This is glaringly obvious in the Islamic world, where the majority cares not a jot for the liberal's dearly-held beliefs. The same general point was well-illustrated in the early 1930s, when liberalism came up against the intractable hatred and political intransigence of Adolf Hitler.

At the time, the leader of the opposition British Labour Party was a certain George Lansbury, a much beloved and saintly man. It was his belief that disarmament was the best means of compelling Hitler to mend his ways. Britain, he said, should stand before the world 'armed only by justice and love.' He went to Berlin to meet Hitler and at the close of the meeting asked Hitler for a positive message to take back to his Jewish constituents. He was assailed by a torrent of abuse which according to reports left the translator utterly incapacitated.

Nevertheless, Lansbury returned home still of the belief that Hitler was merely a lost soul who might yet receive salvation in the Anglican Communion. Winston Churchill at the time was written off by many as a right-wing warmonger for steadfastly pointing out the evils of the Nazis. Lansbury may well have been a saintly man but he was also a silly man. While Hitler was in thrall to a racist ideology, Arab Muslims are in thrall to a religious ideology. Both are totalitarian in scope. Muslims are enjoined to view every aspect of life, including politics, through the prism of their faith. Let's look at how Islam affects the practice of politics in the Arab world.

In general, there are two models of politics - the economic model and the religious model. In the economic model everything is subject to negotiation and compromise, and even though compromise may not be easy or even desirable, it is always possible. When Israel sits down at the table with the Palestinians, it directs itself according to the economic model of politics, which means, it expects to compromise and exchange. It may, for instance, agree to exchange land within the green line for a settlement bloc beyond the green line or make a concession in exchange for a reciprocal concession. But, by and large, everything is subject to negotiation and compromise. The liberal understands and feels at home in this model.

On the other hand, there is the religious model of politics. In this model, there are things that can never be compromised. The reason is that the religious model incorporates the concept of the holy, and the holy is neither negotiable nor subject to compromise. When the Palestinians sit down to talk, they do so according to the religious model of politics, which means genuflecting to Islam. In Islam there is no distinction between religion and politics. Religion is part of politics and politics is

part of religion. The role of politics is to protect the religious way of life, and therefore, in matters which are touched by the holy, compromise is not possible.

According to Islam, if land has once been Islamic, it cannot revert to its former status. To relinquish it amounts to apostasy, and the punishment for apostasy is death. On the brink of an historic settlement at Camp David, Arafat walked away, not because he was afraid of losing face, but because he was afraid of losing his head. The same would apply to Abbas or any future Palestinian leader.

Does the liberal take this into account? No, because the liberal regards his ideals as sacrosanct; they are more than just a political preference; they are a matter of faith. When the liberal's ideals are threatened, he will jettison Israel rather than his ideals. This was true of Jewish communists in the last century and it is true of liberals today, including Jewish liberals. The liberal's belief in the power of reason and negotiation is such that for him there has to be a solution to the problem, peace has to be possible. If the Arabs can't be persuaded to negotiate and are not receptive to pressure, then the only other option is to put pressure on the party that is - Israel. So Israel is blamed for the breakdown of talks and for being intransigent. By blaming Israel, the liberal preserves his liberal principles, saves himself the unpleasant task of confronting Arab rage and violence, and gives himself a reason for not coming to the defence of Israel.

The last two delusions deal with the way in which Jews respond to antisemitism. Delusions 5 incorporates the belief that Jews can mitigate antisemitism by proving their worth and, Delusion 6, that they can mitigate it by eliciting pity.

Delusion 5: The 'I am worthy' plea

The 'I am worthy' plea comes in two varieties - 'I am worthy because of my achievements' and 'I am worthy because of my ethical standing.'

First, 'I am worthy because of my achievements.' Jews are an enormously energetic and creative people. It is reasonable to say that their achievements in almost every field of human endeavour are at least partly the result of their desire for acceptance. The logic is as follows: if I show that I am a productive and law-abiding citizen, I will prove myself worthy of acceptance, or at the very least, unworthy of hatred. Maybe this is why Jews relish nothing more than broadcasting their achievements (if the number of e-mails doing the rounds listing Jewish Nobel prize-winners and Israel's spectacular achievements are anything to go by).

But hatred is not dispelled by proofs of excellence. The antisemite is not interested in the real-life Jew and his multiple achievements, but in the fantasy Jew and his multiple vices. In any case, what have achievements to do with being

accepted as an equal? Is it not demeaning to play along with the idea that Jews should have to sing for their supper; to have to earn what is naturally due to them?

The second version of the plea is 'I am worthy because of my ethical standing.' Jews seem to have a burning desire to advertise their goodness and this takes the form of setting higher standards for themselves than for anyone else. To begin with, this is morally incoherent. The basic principle of meta-ethics is universalisability, which means one standard for everyone. For Jews to hold themselves to higher standard smacks of moral grandstanding if not narcissism. Ironically, when others hold Jews to a higher standard, they shout 'foul' yet they prescribe this for themselves.

The great proponent of this idea is the Jewish human rights advocate - it is the source of his moral prowess and his confused politics. For him, to be equal to others is not good enough: "I want to be held to a higher standard", he says, and goes on to cite the historic Jewish mission to be 'a light unto the nations.' By holding Israel to a higher standard, he confuses what might be seen as Israel's religious shortcomings, with the singling out of Israel by other nations. He is either blind or indifferent to the fact that Israel is being held to a double standard, not by God, but by other men.

Jewish moral decency cannot be a substitute for the moral decency of others. The Jewish desire for ethical acclaim directs the world's attention away from where moral scrutiny should really come to rest. For example, after the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, Israel was alone in setting up a commission of enquiry, with the world in close attendance. As a consequence, the attention of the world was diverted from the Christian group who did the actual killing, and they were let off the hook. This is surely an instance of directing the 'pointing finger' at oneself.

Delusion 6: The 'eliciting pity' method

A second attempt to mitigate antisemitism is to elicit from others the same pity Jews feel for themselves. So, we erect Holocaust memorials, teach Holocaust studies, and ensure that Yad Vashem is the first stop for foreigners visiting Israel. The underlying belief is that by imparting information on the Holocaust, we will reduce the chance of it ever happening again. This belief is partly misplaced. If the innocence of Jews did not protect them in the first place, so why should advertising that innocence now be more effective?

The antisemite draws his own conclusions from the Holocaust: (1) it demonstrates that the Jews are an easy target; (2) it demonstrates that the international community was prepared to abandon the Jews in their hour of need; and (3) it suggests that there must be a reason why Jews were selected for such treatment in the first place. Rather than putting a stop to antisemitism, focussing on the Holocaust may actually

encourage it.

I will end with four short observations. First is that antisemitism as an ideology should be studied. It should become a formal subject of study at schools and universities. More so than Holocaust studies antisemitism, as a contemporary political ideology, should become part of the syllabuses in political science, sociology and philosophy departments around the world. Its dangers for Jews and for society in general should be clearly recognised. Not to do this is to allow the possibility of its resuscitation.

Next, we must not count on the world being benevolent. In other words, let us not succumb to the belief in a universal, post-national brotherhood of man. In the real world, the shadow coexists with the light and the negative with the positive, so let's not pretend it is otherwise. Those who should be most benevolent to Jews have repeatedly fallen short of right behaviour. Just as Christianity failed to live up to its own teachings in its treatment of the Jews, so, too, has liberalism. In becoming fellow travellers to anti-Jewish politics, they have betrayed the Jews together with their own principles.

Thirdly, Jews should shake off the belief that they hold the key to the eradication of antisemitism. Just as the status of Jews was once made contingent by the hostility of non-Jews, so has the status of Israel been made contingent by Arab hostility and resentment. Ultimately, it is up to non-Jews to eradicate antisemitism; they invented it and practise it and only they can expunge it.

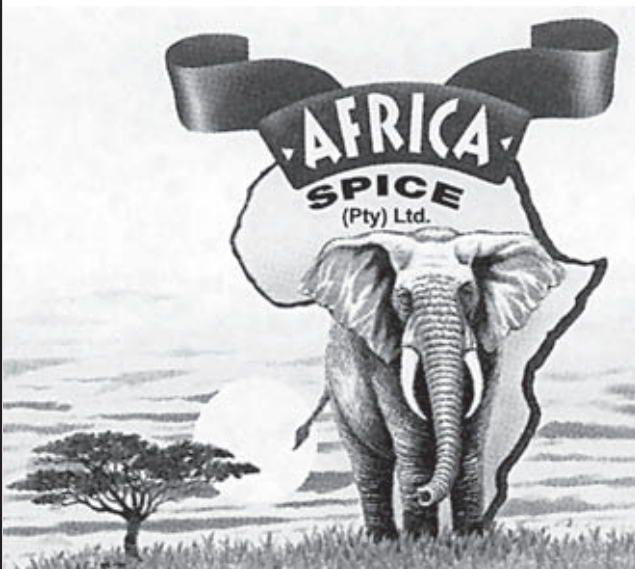
Finally, let's take the fight to the antisemite. As has been pointed out, Jews habitually fall for the trick of the 'pointing finger.' It is time we brought an end to this game of 'Jewish victim'. Why should we sportingly take on the defence of a position that is doomed from the start? It is time to move from defence to offence, to level the playing field, even if this means confronting our accusers with accusations of our own.

Jewish self-affirmation has never been an exercise for the faint-hearted. The strength of the Jewish people, sharpened by endurance for over 2000 years, will prevail against the antisemite's lies. But to do so requires that we understand clearly how living in the shadow of our tragic history affects the way we think.

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EROS AND THANATOS AND THE PERPETUATION OF THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

*

Babs Barron

While acknowledging that he contributed much to the study of the human psyche, I am not a disciple of Freud. That being said, I believe that his notion of the eternal conflict between the two instinctual drives, *Eros* (towards love/life) and *Thanatos* (towards death and decay), is particularly apposite when one looks at the Palestinian/Arab being in the world.¹

According to Freud's theory, *Eros* inspires us to strive for individual happiness and informs our wishes to unite with others. It drives living organisms to develop. *Thanatos*, on the other hand, represents decay, and drives the organism toward a return to the inorganic, to death. Freud posits that these two forces are in conflict with one another and that this conflict and interaction determines the development of the individual's life (and, I would argue, ultimately his/her contribution to societal culture).

This cannot be said to apply to the policies and actions of Palestinian governments, at least one of whose ministers is on record as saying that Palestinians desire death, which they say they love more than life.² While Palestinian leaders do not include themselves in the kind of behaviours which bear this out, the disposable rank and file, and in particular young children, are carefully indoctrinated into severing themselves from their natural human instincts to survive so as to perpetuate hatred down the generations.

If Freud is right, and we are indeed all engaged in our own struggles between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, why are not all societies as conflicted and murderously inclined as those of Hamas and other Islamist-led regimes? The majority of humankind is not continuously enacting this dichotomous battle between love and regeneration and hatred and annihilation as part of its very social identity. Although such conflict exists, emerging periodically in instances of armed conflict, in most societies it does not form the *natural* relationship between peoples as is the case in the dominant Palestinian culture.

One explanation may be that for most people in developed societies, *Eros* and *Thanatos* exist at opposite ends of a continuum. In most mature people, *Eros* is able to override *Thanatos* for the majority of the time, or at least there is a balance

between the two which makes life comfortable, even fulfilling. Such people have developed sufficiently to be able to make a synthesis between the two, which translates into how they interact with and relate to others in the wider society. However, this requires cognitive and emotional maturity and the capability to tolerate a degree of frustration and uncertainty until that synthesis is complete. I would argue that if enough people in any society possess these attributes then *Eros* tends to override *Thanatos* for most of the time.

By contrast, in societies dominated by radical Islamist ideologies, the ability to arrive at a mature, balanced synthesis is rendered impossible for many of its members. A prime example of this is the case of the Palestinians, whose self-destructive behaviour towards Israel and towards each other would seem to indicate that they are developmentally, cognitively and psychologically 'stuck'. For them, a healthy synthesis between *Eros* and *Thanatos* is difficult, if not impossible, not least because they cannot tolerate the psychological frustration which necessarily occurs before a successful synthesis can take place.

Palestinians and others subject to the same modes of thought repeat the behaviours which cause them anguish rather than trying a different course that might prove more fruitful. When faced with failure or uncertainty, their tendency is to resort to the behaviours they are used to rather than to try something different, not least because of the incapability of tolerating the above-mentioned frustration and/or an apparent lack of apprehension of cause and effect. *Thanatos*, in effect, generally wins. Lacking the capability to reason differently and break free, Palestinians become their own self-fulfilling prophecy. This is firmly imbedded through Islam's relentless focus on the afterlife (or more particularly, on the ways in which the devout can avoid the torments of Hell), which leaves its adherents little emotional energy to risk attempting anything new, and as a consequence leaves them wide open to exploitation by their leaders and jihadi/suicide bomber recruiters.

However, it would be misleading and unnecessarily dichotomous to classify all Palestinian Arab attitudes and behaviour in terms of the dominance of the death-glorifying *Thanatos* instinct. We know, for example, that there are many collaborative projects between Israelis and Palestinians, regardless of the official stance of Palestinian/Arab governments. These could not

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take place if Palestinian society was totally *Thanatos*-driven.³ Whilst fewer such projects are initiated by Palestinians, it is nevertheless significant that Palestinians participate in them.

It is tempting to echo the polarisation which already exists in the reporting of the Israel-Palestinian conflict by designating Israel as the *Eros* in this situation. It is true for the most part that Israel's behaviour and 'being-in-the-world' realism places her firmly at the *Eros* end of the spectrum, not least because Israel is forward looking rather than rooted in the past and, as we see, contributes much to the welfare of other nations in terms of sharing with them the fruits of her scientific research and technology. Nevertheless, I would argue that Israel, too, has her own struggles with *Thanatos* although she does not glorify the death instinct in as literal a way as do her Palestinian neighbours.

Israel has survived wars waged to annihilate her and her people and her commitment notwithstanding to continue to grow and look forward shows her to be *Eros*-inclined. That being said, aspects of her political behaviour in the wake of them arguably bring her perilously close to *Thanatos*. Likewise, being a democracy, she also has difficulties within her borders with people who wish her not to exist in her present form and who hold a rosily unrealistic picture of coexistence within a bi-national Israeli-Palestinian state (the "One State Solution") which, I would argue, is based more on wishful thinking than on reality.

Israel's experience after its withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, carried out without firm promises of peace from either Hamas or Fatah, left a *Thanatos* legacy that the country still endures. The renowned commentator Daniel Pipes described the Gaza withdrawal as one of the worst errors ever made by a democracy and argued that it jeopardized the very existence of the Israeli people.⁴ Since Israel left Gaza, thousands of *qassam* missiles and other rockets have been launched on Israeli civilians from the territory. There was also, of course, the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, who was held incommunicado and in solitary confinement for over five years and was only released in exchange for 1027 Palestinian prisoners (some of whom were convicted terrorists). The agreement to release these death-dealing enemies of Israel brought Israel even closer to *Thanatos* since it emboldened the terrorist supporters among the Palestinians. All of the foregoing would seem to bear out Pipes' contention.

Additionally, and depending where one is located on the Israeli political scene, politicians like Avigdor Lieberman, who in November 1996 labelled Arab members of the Knesset who had met with Hamas as terror sympathisers and hoped for their execution, lean more towards *Thanatos*. Netanyahu's concept of a loyalty oath, requiring allegiance to Israel as a Jewish state by all new

Israeli citizens, caused great controversy but is less clear cut, and may be argued to be the reasonable reaction of a people under strain. Although the oath will not affect current citizens, including the Israeli Arab community, the Israeli-Arab Member of Knesset Ahmed Tibi has argued that it relegates Israel's Palestinian citizens to inferior status.⁵ The oath will mainly affect Palestinians living in the West Bank who want to marry Palestinians (regarded by the Israeli government as Israeli Arabs) who live in Israel.

These controversies notwithstanding, however, (and controversies are one sign of a healthy democracy), I would still argue that *Eros* still predominates Israel's collective psyche given her contribution to the world in spite of the dangers she faces.

It would be inspirational indeed if the synthesis between *Eros* and *Thanatos* in the mature individual could be echoed in the relationship between Israelis and between Israel and her neighbours. In order for that to happen, there needs to be a considerable loosening of the *Thanatos*-driven behaviour towards Israelis and Jews by the Palestinian governments (and a corresponding adaptation towards forward-looking, life-embracing *Eros*), in public as well as in private, so that the Palestinian people will then pursue a compromise solution that must surely benefit both parties. Jew-hatred by Palestinians, deliberately cranked up by an Arab legacy of antisemitism underwritten by the Quran, make that well-nigh impossible. Until that can be overcome, the *Eros-Thanatos* dichotomy and the behaviours it engenders seem destined to repeat themselves. Likewise, the extreme right in Israel, made suspicious by Arab rhetoric and repeated disappointment at the peace table, not to mention the consequences of the withdrawal from Gaza, seems immovable and stuck in its resistance to change.

Notes

- 1 Freud, S., *The ego and the id*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.
- 2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWIDZ7Jpdqg> – MEMRI TV
- 3 See, for example, <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/blogs/the-battle-for-water/good-water-neighbours-collaborate-over-waters-shared-by-palestinians-israelis-and-jordanians>; <http://israel21c.org/social-action-2/daughters-for-life-fund-transcends-tragedy/>; <http://israel21c.org/social-action-2/learning-to-love-the-neighbors-video/>; <http://israel21c.org/social-action-2/greener-ties-for-jordan-and-israel/>; <http://israel21c.org/social-action-2/peace-from-the-grassroots/>; <http://israel21c.org/environment/eco-park-for-a-green-peace/>; <http://israel21c.org/news/an-israeli-palestinian-spring/>
- 4 <http://www.danielpipes.org/2861/the-gaza-withdrawal-a-democracy-killing-itself>
- 5 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israeli-arab-mk-loyalty-oath-relegates-israel-s-palestinian-citizens-to-inferior-status-1.320624>

ZIONISM IN DISTRICT SIX AND OTHER STORIES OF AFRICA AND ISRAEL

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Benji Shulman

In foreign policy circles, the history of the association between Israel and the African continent is fairly well known. This is not surprising because the trials and tribulations of this relationship marked important periods in the histories of various countries. It also promoted large swings in international policy. The understanding of this relationship, however, is limited in South Africa. There are several reasons for this. One is that the country was for the latter part of the 20th Century cut off from much international news. This has meant that issues concerning Africa are generally less well understood than other aspects of international affairs. Another important reason is that one of Israel's most high profile engagements with the African continent was with the old South African government from about 1973 till the late 1980s. Those wanting to paint Israel as a racist state have focused a great deal on this period, despite the fact that it accounts for less than a quarter of the time that Africa-Israel relations have been in existence. What does not fit with this narrative, however, is the widespread Zionist sympathies that have always existed in Africa and have including some of Africa's greatest liberation heroes. It also ignores the current growing relationship between African states and Israel, particularly the large upswing in trade and various humanitarian concerns.

This article gives an overview of Africa-Israel relations starting back in ancient times and proceeds to examine the early periods of the Zionist movement and black nationalism, through to the establishment of Israel and the ending of colonialism. Following this, it will outline the period of continental Cold War politics and conclude with a discussion of current trends.

An Ancient Friendship

Jewish people and the African continent have had ties since antiquity. The first recorded relationship with Africa is in the Bible, most notably with Egypt in the Exodus. State relations also existed with the Kingdom of Solomon. A great builder and trader, Solomon created a trading fleet that successfully plied up and down the coast of East Africa. Besides the usual gold, silver and ivory, peacocks and even monkeys were traded. It

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was out of these liaisons that the famous story of the Queen of Sheba emerges, and, with it, the royal line of Ethiopia.

The creation of the Jewish Diasporas by the Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans helped to create additional Jewish presences in Africa. Jews settled mainly in Europe and Asia, but many would eventually also settle along the Mediterranean African coast, especially as a result of the Spanish Inquisition. There have also been noted Judaic practices found in Africa on the West Coast, among people like the Ibo, and along the East Coast among the Lemba. Of course, there is also the famous Ethiopian Jewish community which has existed since ancient times.

The Coming of Nationalism

For much of the past 2000 years, Jews have lived in this exile in African countries. Depending on the ruler, life was often easier or more difficult. Certainly the continent has never reached the heights of antisemitism commonly associated with Europe. Around a century years ago, there was a great shift in Jewish-Africa relations with the rise of modern nationalism. At the time, both Africans and Jews found themselves as the despised peoples of the earth. The Jews had the issue of centuries of antisemitism and dispersion, while Africans had the evils of slavery and racism. Thus, when nationalism started to become accepted as a major political trend both communities began to take note. There are, in fact, remarkable similarities between both groups' responses to this and it is interesting to see how the growth of Zionism and African Nationalism mirrored one another. For example, Golda Meir quoted the following passage by Theodor Herzl in *Altneuland* (1902):

There is still one other question arising out of the disaster of the nations that only a Jew can comprehend. This is the African question. Just call to mind all those terrible episodes of the slave trade, of human beings who, merely because they were black, were stolen like cattle, taken prisoner, captured and sold. Their children grew up in strange lands, the object of contempt and hostility because their complexions were different. I am not ashamed to say, though I expose myself to ridicule in saying so, that once I have witnessed the redemption of the Jews, my people, I wish to also to assist in the redemption of the Africans.

In African intellectual circles, the national Jewish liberation was a very popular topic with

one Edward Wilmot Blyden, a father of Pan-Africanism, referring to it as “that wonderful movement called Zionism”. The notion of these so called “Black Zionists” was championed in particular by the influential pan-Africanist thinker and politician Marcus Garvey, originally from Jamaica. Garvey was supported by Jews early on in his career and argued that the best and most effective way for Africans to redeem themselves was to go back to their ancient homeland and build a state. He stated that “many white men have tried to uplift them, but the only way is for the Negroes to have a nation of their own, like the Jews, that will command the respect of the nations of the world with its achievements”. Garvey was a major supporter of Zionism for much of his life and his influence on African nationalism was profound. For a start, it engendered a great respect for Zionism in the American Civil Rights Movement and was one of the reasons that leaders like Martin Luther King Jr expressed sentiments such as his famous comment that “when people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews”. This affinity for Zionism lasted for many years and was only replaced when Malcolm X’s proto-Islamic militarism became popular.

The major effect of Garvey’s writings, however, was in Africa. Those affected by the degradation of colonialism responded to his strident liberationist tones and all over the continent his works were popular. In South Africa he was widely read. District Six had not one but two Garveyist newspapers expounding his Zionist ideals. He also had a large impact on the first successful independence struggle for an African state in Ghana. These interactions set the tone for the next phase of the Israel and Africa relationship as Israel was created and African states threw off the shackles of colonialism.

A Modern Friendship

The friendship between Israel and Africa was more than just a creation of commonalities between national ideologies; it was a product of the overwhelming forces of the Cold War. At the beginning of the 1950s, the new-born Jewish state found itself with few friends. On the one side, it had strained relations with the West and Europe. On the other was a very hostile Communist Bloc and generally unresponsive Asian community. Needless to say, no help was expected from its Arab neighbors, and the American-Israeli relationship that we know today was still far in the future. Of course, Israel could always rely on the support of Jews in the Diaspora, but it was also in desperate need of allies. The newly independent African states provided an opportunity to address this.

For the most part, African leaders were eager to become involved with the Israelis. They could relate to the suffering of the Jews, with whom they shared the historical experiences of slavery and persecution. Also, the spread of the Islam and

Christianity in Africa made the knowledge of the geography and history of Israel widespread. Golda Meir notes that she met “as many ‘Moseses’ ‘Samuels’ and ‘Sauls’ in Africa as [she] did back home.” This created an understanding, of Israel even if most people had never been to the country or laid eyes on a Jew. Perhaps the African leader who exemplified this view was Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who said, “We Jews and Negroes understand one another. We have both suffered and now we both have our own independent states”.

There were other reasons for Israeli/African co-operation. As a small country, the chances that Israel could be an agent of neo-colonialism were small. In fact, having recently overthrown the British, Israel was a good example of a successful liberation struggle. Africans liked many of the Zionist institutions that had brought about the creation of the state and sought to mimic them for their own purposes. For instance George Padmore, a West Indian economist, believed that Africa’s development could be fostered using infusions of funding from the African-American Diaspora, along the same lines as the United Jewish Appeal. This stress on unity was important for Kenya’s President Jomo Kenyatta who said, “You have built a nation with Jews coming from all corners of the world; we want to build a unified Kenya of a multitude of tribes joined together through *Harambee* (working together)”. Zionist military formations were the inspiration for the concept and structure of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress. In planning MK, the Nelson Mandela drew on the experiences of a Zionist who fought in the Israeli War of Independence, Arthur Goldreich. Israel also did a lot to build up defense infrastructure in many African countries, especially training their military and police. The first pilots of the Kenyan, Ugandan and Tanzanian air force were all trained by Israel. The Israelis also built Ghana’s first naval academy and trained the continent’s first paratroopers.

Finally, African states and Israel shared many of the same issues, given that they were both developing countries. The skills of the *kibbutz* learned by draining swamps and making the Negev desert bloom were badly needed in Africa. The array of development initiatives was vast and included construction, agriculture, aquaculture, health care, hydrology, youth movements, regional planning, engineering, community services and many others. Some of the most famous projects included assistance in building the parliament in Sierra Leone and the creation of Ghana’s Back Star line shipping company. Many Israelis came to live in Africa to assist with programs, particularly in health care. Through these engagements a specialist eye clinic was built again in Sierra Leone and social work training provided in Machakos, Kenya. Many Africans, in turn, went to Israel to learn in its tertiary institutions, including the Weitzman Institute, Hebrew University and the Mount Carmel Centre

dedicated to training women in the developing world. Walter Sisulu visited Israel on his famous five-nation tour in 1953. He flew via El Al, as the South African government had denied him a passport and there was no other airline that would take him without it.

Israeli involvement with African states stretched the length and breadth of the continent, from Tubman's Liberia in the West to Haile Selassie's Ethiopia in the East to Kenneth Kaunda's Zambia in the South. By 1973, Israel had relations with 32 African states, more than any other country in the world with the exception of the former European powers. African countries' relationships with Israel were very deep. Unlike their Western counterparts, African states saw it as natural that they should place their embassies in Jerusalem, thus affirming the city as the capital of the Jewish state.

Friendship Troubles

All the while, however, the power of the Arab states was growing in international diplomacy. Their official policy position on Israel was that it should be wiped off the map. They watched the growing African/Israel relationship with concern and tried to impede it. Championed by Egypt, they attempted to ferment their anti-Zionist rhetoric onto the agenda of the OAU and its predecessor bodies. The first serious actions in these forums were taken in the early 1960s but were strongly rebuffed by the African states. As Julius Nyerere, president of Tanzania, put it, "we are not going to let our friends determine who our enemies are". Besides the risk of losing their friendship with Israel, African leaders were nervous of Arab imperialism and memories lingered of the sub-Saharan slave trade. On being accused by a Saudi Arabian delegate of "selling out" to Israel, one Ivorian delegate responded, "The representative of Saudi Arabia may be used to buying Negroes, but he can never buy us". In fact Israel's foreign policy in Africa was hailed as a major success and the continents delegates helped put Israeli representatives on boards of the WHO and UNICEF.

Despite these positive developments, by the early 1960s Israel's relationship with Africa had started to strain. This was partly due to the failure of some development projects, mostly for lack of large scale capital and sometimes because of differences in culture. There was also the fact that Israeli policy had broadened by then and there was focusing increasingly on other continents such as South America. Then, of course, there was the relentless Arab propaganda machine urging nations to cut ties with Israel. The 1967 Six Day War next gave a new impetus to anti-Zionist rhetoric. Israel was no longer seen as the underdog and Egypt was able to rely on calls for African solidarity. The Arabs also began to focus their propaganda efforts on tailoring their message to African narratives. Having taken the Sinai

Peninsula in the war, Israel was now on African soil and Arab states began to talk about Israel as an agent of neo-colonialism and an occupier of the continent. This approach began to have an effect and four nations had broken ties with Israel by the early 1970s. In October 1973 the Arab nations, again backed by Egypt, then launched a surprise attack on Israel, beginning on Yom Kippur. Although the attack would eventually fail, it introduced a new powerful weapon into world diplomacy: global oil politics. The Arab nations, angered by the military assistance given by America, threatened any country who had relations with Israel with an oil embargo unless they broke ties immediately. They also promised aid to those African countries that did so. The strategy sent the oil price rocketing, lead to a major economic crisis and in all proved to be extraordinarily successful from the Arab point of view. The combination of economic pressure and continuous propaganda added to an already strained relationship. This was too much for African states to bear and they began abandoning Israel *en masse*. President Senghor of Senegal put the situation plainly: "The Arabs have the numbers, space and oil. In the Third World, they outweigh Israel." By the end of 1973, Israel found itself almost without any official friends in Africa.

Feeling themselves to be in control, the Arab nations decided to press their advantage on the floor of the United Nations. With the help of Idi Amin Dada, who was heading the delegation, and a number of African states, they passed the infamous "Zionism is Racism" resolution in 1975. It was around this time that Israel commenced the relationship with Africa for which it is most remembered - its ties with South Africa.

Israel and South Africa

Although Israel always had relations with South Africa going back to Prime Minister Jan Smuts, these were often tense and problematic. In 1952 Israel downgraded the relationship. Up until 1973, Israel had always been a consistent supporter of Asia/Africa block resolutions condemning apartheid, even in the face of Western powers such as America, France and England who were opposing such action. After one particularly aggressive resolution from the Israelis, then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd accused Israel of being hypocritical, claiming that it was similar to South African apartheid. He was the first person to try and make the analogy. Verwoerd then began threatening South African Jews over the issue and refused for some time to allow them to send money through the IUA to Israel. However, the Yom Kippur War changed the geo-political landscape, not just in Africa but also in Israel, as a new more right-wing government came to power. With this change and Israel backed into a continental corner, the Israel-South Africa relationship strengthened right into the 1980s.

Of course, many western nations were involved

in a much larger way with the regime, with Israel accounting for just 1% of global trade in South Africa in 1986, as were a number of Arab states happy to grease the Apartheid system with illegal sanctions-busting oil exports. In the case of Israel, however, there were a number of factors that lead to the countries being identified more closely. This was due to the very public nature of the relationship, the fact that it included military and even alleged nuclear transfers and that it occurred late into the end of apartheid. This has meant that was the aspect of Israel's Africa policy that is the most particularly well known. It has affected ANC sentiment toward Israel and although South Africa maintains formal ties and extensive trade networks its public stance remains hostile. This is exacerbated by close connections to the Palestinians and a number of aggressive anti-Israel dictatorships. In addition, the ANC's internal politics have made targeting Israel easy and thus an antagonistic discourse pervades discussions of policy.

Friends Again

In 1977 Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, took a one-hour flight to the Knesset and spoke about the importance of peace. One year later, this would result in the world's first historic Arab/Israeli peace treaty and removed Egypt as the principle hostile entity in region. This, in turn, opened the door for Israel to begin relations with Africa once again. African states were certainly interested in reestablishing those relationships. Arab money had very often had failed to materialize and the spiraling oil price had hurt their agriculturally based economies. African states also had various more selfish reasons for creating new ties. Mobutu, for instance, renewed ties in 1982 partly because he was trying to get Jewish American politicians to stop pressurizing him over human rights abuses in the Congo. The next state to reestablish ties was Liberia, whose leaders were afraid of Muammar Gaddafi and wanted training from Israeli intelligence. Despite these successes, Africa and Israel would have to wait for the end of the Cold War and Apartheid before diplomacy really got off the ground. In 1991, the "Zionism is Racism" resolution was taken off the books at the UN, bringing to a close an unfortunate chapter in that institution's history. It was also around this time that the move towards a democratic South Africa gained momentum. Israeli diplomatic initiatives towards the ANC were well received, removing another impediment in its relations with Africa.

Today, Africa-Israel relations are again on a strong footing. The Jewish state now has ties with forty African states, more than ever before. Gone also is the anti-Zionist rhetoric of the 1970s and 1980s, now largely only the preserve of ivory tower academics. Among the most enthusiastic supporters of Israel are in Southern Africa, including Angola and Botswana. Mutual

assistance programs are again being put into action and trade relations are progressing. Israel now exports around one billion dollars worth of products and services to Africa. A big growth area has been in the security sector, where countries like Kenya are looking for assistance to counter threats from the neighboring Islamist regime in Somalia. On the other side of the continent, in Nigeria and the ECOWAS region, Israeli technologies have been used in a more developmental manner, including assistance in food security, water conservation and anti-desertification measures. NGOs have also gotten involved with providing development aid and assistance. One example is Jewish Heart for Africa which brings sustainable Israeli technologies like solar power to Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda helping some 250 000 people. In South Africa, the Israeli embassy has a fish farming expert as part of its staff to assist with products around the country. Even the Jewish National Fund, more often associated with its endeavors inside the country, has donated its agricultural expertise to helping a Rwandan 'Kibbutz' that houses survivors of the 1994 genocide.

Threats to Israel's relationship still exist, however, despite these promising developments. Iran has been pushing into the continent to try and counter its growing isolation in the world and to look for additional trade partners. This has mostly to do with oil but Congolese human rights activists have accused the Iranian regime of also trying to secure Uranium in the central African state. Israeli mercenaries have also earned a reputation for being involved in some of Africa's internal conflicts and companies in the mining sector are sometimes accused of corruption. Israel has also started to negotiate the difficult terrain of African migrants coming into the country in search of economic opportunities and safety. Early on, it was very welcoming of these refugees, taking in even those from enemy Arab states who were being persecuted. Unfortunately the outbursts of anti-immigrant violence that occurred early in 2012 have done much damage to its image regarding this issue.

Despite these challenges, the state of Israel-Africa relations is light years ahead of the Yom Kippur War period. With companies looking for new growth opportunities and with currently having a more stable political environment on the continent, the time is right for more collaboration in the private sector. The ability of various African states to find creative solutions to development challenges whilst securing these gains in a secure society is a space where governments and NGOs are already working. The wealth of opportunities between people, resources and innovative ideas has much potential. For those obsessed with the past in South Africa, it is time to see the new dawn in Israel-Africa relations and the losses that will occur if our country is not part it.

OUR FRIEND SARAH

*

Hazel Frankel

Editor's Note: Sarah Levine passed away in August 2012. She attended weekly Yiddish classes at the Great Park Synagogue under the auspices of the Yiddish Academy until the end of her life, and always remained passionate about her *mame-loshn* and her cultural roots. A rich source of knowledge, she enjoyed sharing her experiences with the class, and will be sorely missed. The following article is adapted from the collection of narratives, *Memoirs: Our Stories; Our Lives* by Hazel Frankel that was published by the Chevrah Kadisha in 2010.

Hazel Frankel is a Johannesburg-based novelist, poet and educator. She has recently completed a PhD on the South African Yiddish poet David Fram.

Sarah Levine, née Polonetski, was born in 1924 in Alte Baranovitch (Old Baranovitch), the Jewish ghetto that was separate from gentile Naie Baranovitch (New Baranovitch) and from the outlying White Russian farming area. Her birth certificate shows it as part of Poland. She was one of four children.

Rochel, Sarah's mother, had her own small shop at the age of sixteen. It was in her parents' house in the town centre. There she baked bread and sold cigarettes, cold drinks and matches. Sarah's maternal grandfather looked like an angel with a big white beard. He swam and fished in the Niemen River near the one horse town where he grew up. Sarah's paternal grandmother died in childbirth when her father, Shlomo (Shleimke), and his sister were very young. Her grandfather, a tailor, remarried and had five more children. When his second wife passed away, he married her sister and had another two children; Shlomo was neglected and then abandoned. He told Sarah about visiting cousins in another *shtetl* and returning through the forest at night alone, where, between two trees, he found the remains of a fire with some potatoes left by shepherds. He ate them though they were soggy with rainwater and did not wash, even in a puddle before going home - no one worried about where he was, let alone whether he was clean or not.

Shlomo was conscripted and trained for four years in the Russian army in Yeremitch, Siberia. He was one of the first to be called up in the 1914-1918 war. With other young soldiers from the *shtetlach* he was stationed near Baranovitch, where he spent *Shabbos* with various families. This was how he met Sarah's mother. It was a love match even though her mother was *frum*. They became secretly engaged when he went off to fight. He was a prisoner of war in Germanie per Elbe, where her mother wrote warning him of the intensification of antisemitism in Poland. His army service and imprisonment are memorialised

in a *siddur* that he had with him and her mother copied the inscription and sewed the logo design of the POW war camp in cross-stitch onto a cushion cover. Sarah later completed and framed it.

Sarah's parents built their own home from wooden logs that they selected individually at the market place. It was a house with a veranda, from where they sat and watched the comings and goings on the street. It was not a *heif* (a courtyard with little flatlets opening into a yard). The entrance was at the side of the house. There they took off their snowshoes, galoshes, coats and umbrellas that were useless in a snowstorm: the coats not warm enough and the umbrellas were not strong enough. Underneath all that paraphernalia, they wore their nice clothes - they had to get undressed to be dressed nicely.

The family grew most of its own produce and pickled their cucumber crop for the winter. A *poeyer* came to plough the yard and Sarah walked behind him planting potatoes. He would return to re-plough when it was time to pick the potatoes. These were stored in the dark *sklep* that was reached by a wooden ladder. They kept their own hens and had enough chickens and eggs to eat. The staple Russian diet was *rosheve* bread, the darkest black bread, with pickled or *shmaltz* herring and raw onions. The villagers congregated at the well as no one had their own water supply and Sarah helped her little brother *shlepping wasser* (carrying water) from the *brunen*, the well by lowering their bucket on a hook. They then heated the water on a stove and poured it into a galvanised tub to bath. The outhouse was a moveable structure over a hole in the ground that would be covered with the sand. They then dug a new one and moved the cubicle over it. Some wealthier families did have inside sewage.

Their home was the last in the street next to the forest where they picked *yagdis* that stained their fingers. They played hide and seek in the cornfields nearby and walked everywhere, visiting friends on *Shabbos*.

The children were involved with their mother in the running of the home. They hung the washing

up on the *beidim* but Sarah couldn't go up as she was afraid of heights. The shirts froze stiff like dolls and had to be carried downstairs, the ice melted off and they were then hung up again to dry. They did the washing up with sand and ash in boiling water. Their neighbours were part of the family; they all helped each other with their problems. Her uncle had a bicycle and electrical goods shop. The *Rov* boarded with her mother's aunt.

Sarah said, "It was a life in which there were no choices. We were committed Jews and we knew what you did and didn't do. My mother had a special relationship with the Chofetz Chaim, who came from Baranovitch. We made a *brocha* for everything, even the tiniest sip of water."

Government schools were closed to Jews and there were quotas at Polish universities. Baranovitch was a big enough *shtetl* to warrant a *Beis Yaankev* school and that was where they went. Although it was very expensive, their mother regarded this as a priority.

They did all their subjects in Yiddish, learned Hebrew as a separate subject and also had to learn Polish, possibly because the school received a subsidy. They did not have a school uniform but wore a skirt and shirt or a dress. These were bought, not homemade.

Sarah knew her maternal grandparents. Her Bobba would 'lay hands' on the *poyerim* on market days, knew various prayers for healing and was paid for her services. The villagers swore by her and Sarah always wished her mother had known those prayers.

The Jewish population was terrified of the non-Yidden. One day while Sarah was sitting on the veranda, a Polack threw a brick at her. She ran inside to her mother, her face covered in blood. In another incident one Sunday, Sarah was carrying her little school case containing her black bread sandwich. As she walked, she watched the moving icicles clinging to the hair on her forehead that made delicate moving pictures. A Polish girl ski-d up and asked her where she was going so early. Sarah answered in Polish that she was going to school. The Pole said, "Sunday morning, you're going to school?" Sarah realised immediately that she was not Jewish and said nothing more; the girl ski-d away.

Her mother's uncle lived in the backyard of a *heif* (courtyard) near to the centre of town. When a *gallach* stole a baby before Pesach and killed it, he threw the baby into her uncle's flat. The maid went out to pick it up and the priest stabbed her. The uncle then went to help and got blood on his clothes. After the priest inflamed the locals with stories of the blood libel, the *poyerim* gave evidence that they had seen the murder and her uncle went to jail.

As a tailor, Shlomo was unable to make a living in Baranovitch. He left to try and make good in South Africa. Her mother was then known as Rochel *der Afrikaner* because her husband was

in Africa.

Sarah's brother Leibl was still a baby when he left. When asked where his *tate* was, Leibl pointed to the picture their mother kept in her cupboard and said, "*in almer*." Once a month, Shlomo sent Rochel a five-pound draft and sometimes even a gold sovereign because South Africa was not yet off the gold standard. This translated into a lot of zlotys, which her mother drew on as needed.

Sarah's father had been in South Africa for four years when the family got permits to join him. They left Baranovitch on 23 December 1932 when Sarah was eight years old. It was the first time she'd been to the station. The train was not level with the platform and it was difficult for her to climb up into the carriage. The Polonetskis travelled third class in the last carriages and the four children ran up and down the passages, past the second-class plush carriages where a huge fat German lay sleeping on a *chaise longue*.

In Warsaw, Sarah lived in a flat for the first time when they stayed with a *landsfroi* (someone from their home *shtetl*). At night, far above the city, she could see fires travelling fast down below. Her mother explained to her that these were trams. Once their papers had been organised at the British Consulate they could leave for Germany. The shops were full of beautiful things, and Sarah particularly remembers the beautiful *lialkes*. She went for a walk around the block, window-shopping on her own just before they were due to leave one Saturday night. When she returned, her mother was angry with her as she had almost caused them to miss the train. At the border, they watched fearfully as the Polish conductors handed the train over to the Germans.

The family travelled for three days and nights across Germany, passing through Berlin. They did not get off the train there because antisemitism was rife. Hitler was a wonderful orator: at his rallies his tears for the youth who were without jobs convinced them of his sympathy. From Ostend, they crossed the Channel in a small boat, lying down on bunks to try to counteract the seasickness and making frequent use of the brown paper bags they'd been given. They docked at Southampton and spent a week at the Jewish Temporary Shelter, running up and down the stairs and playing with the children, even though they could not communicate in English.

The family boarded the Arundel Castle on a Friday and were welcomed on deck, but Sarah's mother thought they had been called together because the ship was drowning. Everyone was given life jackets but had no idea what to do with them. The Bilchik family, the parents, two grown up sons and daughter, travelled with them and they helped Sarah's mother who was totally responsible for her brood. It was a great *opkoemenisch*.

When Beryl Bilchik's *shlappe* flew into the water, he expected the ship to turn back for it. Sarah's brother, six year old Leibl, swung back

and forwards on the deck above the ocean and they were all afraid he would fall in until old man Bilchik threatened to smack him. Sarah warned him that the disconnected voice from the radio was telling him to stop because he had been seen! At a party on board they were all given ice cream, cake and sweets. It was there that Sarah first saw a black man.

They ate only kosher food. They also collected nuts off each table after dinner and stored in old man Bilchik's pockets. When the ship docked at Cape Town, they tossed what was left of the packets of rusks, sweet and flavoured with cinnamon, brought from *der heim*, into the sea.

They settled in Johannesburg where they were not well off. Shlomo worked for Maxims. He had brought with his own sewing machine as well as his iron that had to be filled with hot coals and so he also did bespoke tailoring. He did every task himself, not even giving out buttons or buttonholes to anyone else to complete.

He was paid £4.10 for a bespoke suit that required measuring, cutting and shaping. The suits he made fitted like *parmunitste barg arop* (like the slop water as it pours down a hill, taking the shape of the earth). For relaxation he read the *Forverts*, in which Sarah enjoyed the *Episodden*, i.e. stories that people sent in.

The children continued to speak Yiddish at home so Rochel could understand them. Shlomo went shopping on *Shabbos*, but their mother remained *frum*. As a Jewish education was a priority, the children went to Doornfontein *cheder*. There the pupils cross-examined Sarah on the *brochas*. She soon realised that they themselves did not know the answers – when she made a mistake, they never corrected her.

When Sarah asked her father for a *lialke*, he replied, “You’re already a *kallemeidel* and you want a *lialke*?” (You’re ready to be a bride and you want a doll!) He bought Sarah’s sister a Little Boy Blue Doll made of celluloid that held a basket with its rigid arms and legs. Sarah dressed it in coloured capes made with fur collected through the mesh fence of a nearby factory.

Sarah went to Jeppe Junior and Middle Schools and then to Malvern High where she learned English, Afrikaans and Maths. She went on to the Johannesburg Technical College, which she left at sixteen without completing her commercial matric. She worked in a clothing factory owned by Wolpe and Berger; the former was the buyer, the latter was in charge of the machines. Sarah wore a ribbon in her hair, slippers sandals and a button-through dress and the workers thought she was the owner’s daughter. When she put on nail polish, her parents said nothing but the bosses picked her out. Later she did the books for a Mr Hechter who had branches of his shop in Heilbron, Standerton, Vrede and Lobatsi in Bechuanaland.

Sarah said, “We knew we were poor but we accepted it. It didn’t hurt us that we went without cakes and toys. There is nothing wrong in doing

without. We always gave charity and our mother brought us up to ask whether a toy for ourselves was more important than to give to those who didn’t have enough food. Because I came here with my parents, I was taken care of, I was not afraid. I knew everything was in order and all would be well. Had I come alone to an aunt or grandparent as many others had to, it would have been a different story.”

Her marriage was a love match. They spoke Yiddish to each other and to both sets of parents. They also spoke gibberish while waiting in line for cinema tickets. They had four children, Lynette (Liebele), Vernon, Ronald and Desmond.

Sarah’s mother’s family had remained in Poland. All of them perished. Sarah will never return to Europe and refuses to give money to Poles or Russians. Her parents spoke about how those who were kind and sympathetic were few and far between and said that no one was a friend of the Jews – not English, not French – because it stated in the Bible that the Jews killed their god.

Sarah read the Yiddish-English, English-Yiddish dictionary and enjoyed finding words and expressions that she had not used for a long time. She practised by translating the *chumash* into Yiddish and continued to read and spoke her *mame-loshn* at every opportunity.

Sarah’s generation became the accountants, doctors, income tax experts and interpreters for their parents who spoke only a broken English. She says, “Many immigrants believed that they should have nothing to do with Yiddish so that they could learn English. I wanted to eradicate Polish and Russian from my mind but did not want to forget Yiddish, its literature and its jokes. Yiddish is our heritage and we must keep the memories of *an ander velt* (another world) alive.”



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'A JUST SOCIETY' - AN ARTISTIC NARRATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

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EDITOR'S NOTE: From 22 August to 29 September 2012, a compelling new art exhibition documenting the story of South Africa's transition from Apartheid to Democracy was on show at the Origins Centre, University of the Witwatersrand. Entitled, 'A Just Society', this comprised 48 artworks divided into four chronological parts and visually portrayed "the impacts of Apartheid and the process used by South Africa's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to deal with crimes committed during the Apartheid era". The artist, Madeleine Georgette, had recently donated the collection to the University of the Witwatersrand, and it has since been absorbed into the university's prestigious art collection on both its campuses.

'A Just Society' was curated by Natalie Knight, a leading figure on the South African arts scene of many years standing, as well as a frequent contributor on related subjects to *Jewish Affairs*.¹ She is also the art curator of the Wits West Campus contemporary art collection, and was the main liaison between Georgette and the university throughout the donation process.

In the pre-publicity material, she summed up the aim of the exhibition as being "to engage with students and the public.....to educate, to stimulate discussion and to provide an insight into a topic that by now should be seared into the conscience and consciousness of every thinking South African."

The South African-born Georgette, who has lived in the United States since 1973, was in the country for the launch. During her visit, she met with the editor of *Jewish Affairs* and spoke about what had motivated her to embark on so ambitious and far-reaching a project. Amongst the main points that emerged was that while 'A Just Society' does not have any specifically Jewish content, it was very much driven by her own understanding of and connection to the Holocaust, in which her father had lost almost his entire family. This had given her a particular sensitivity in terms of racial prejudice and persecution.

Georgette was particularly inspired by the manner in which South Africa had gone about confronting and dealing with its past. For her the TRC process, like the country's post-apartheid Constitution, provided a model of its kind for the world at large to follow, and she had been "very moved, inspired and deeply proud" of what South Africa had undertaken. Whereas other truth commissions instituted elsewhere in the world have been very limited in scope, South Africans had had the courage and determination to look honestly at its past history, confront its demons and move forward through a cleansing process of truth-telling and reconciliation. She decided to donate the collection to Wits University, her alma mater, both because she felt strongly that the artworks belonged in South Africa, and as a way of giving something back to the country she grew up in. Wits was chosen to become the recipient of the gift because of the role it had played as a site of protest against apartheid: "Lecturers and students had made sacrifices in the fight against racism. They spoke, wrote, researched and protested with passion, courage and honesty through decades of resistance".²

While growing up in a liberal household, Georgette was acutely aware that she and her family were beneficiaries of apartheid, even if they condemned it. The question was, by benefiting, were all whites to some degree collaborators with the system? Certainly, some whites protested, but could they have done more? Uncomfortable though they are, these questions have to be honestly grappled with. 'A Just Society' provides an imaginative, searingly honest vehicle through which this can be done.

What follows below is Georgette's 'Artist Statement', in which she explains and amplifies on the above-noted themes, as well as selected images from the work itself. Image captions are taken directly from the artist's own text. The full exhibition, with the accompanying text, can be viewed on Madeleine Georgette's official website - <http://www.studiogeorgette.com/>

A JUST SOCIETY - ARTIST STATEMENT

I shall never forget the day in October 1963, which changed the course of South Africa's history. While I was doing my homework, an announcement came over the radio of a raid on the Liliesleaf farm in Rivonia. What followed was the arrest of seven men who ultimately would be tried along with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki for conspiracy and sabotage against the State. Those arrested were described as terrorists, communists and traitors. At dinner that night my parents, Sam and Babette Kabak, talked with fear - fear for those arrested; fear of the future; the likelihood of government crackdowns; censorship; sympathisers going underground; families fleeing the country. And so started the Rivonia Trial, then imprisonment on Robben Island and the Nationalist government's acceleration and implementation of the draconian laws of Apartheid.

This history was part of my own history. My family and I were silent but sympathetic partners in the War of Liberation. We supported the aims and tried not to think about the means. Our lives continued virtually unchanged, though we never ceased to privately condemn the government's policies and associated ourselves with and sometimes participated in the protest movement. My father's entire family was eliminated in the Holocaust.

The history of oppression has touched my life and taught me that human beings around the globe have not learned the lessons of war. Instead, one group succeeds another and former victims become the new perpetrators as savage cycles of endless violence are perpetrated in the name of revenge. However, instead of the expected blood bath, South Africa consciously chose a different path - a unique courageous road to peace - to create light from their darkness.

Although I was born in New York, I lived in South Africa for the first 27 years of my life. In 1994 I was deeply moved by the relatively peaceful transition from Apartheid to majority rule when President FW de Klerk of the ruling National Party handed over the power of the government to President Nelson Mandela (of the ANC). It is this story and its message, this history and its victims and perpetrators that I chose to explore in visual terms and document, synthesise and memorialise so that the record speaks. I deliberately focused on those who stepped forward and testified.

My hope is that when the record speaks many will listen and see there can be an end to ethnic hatred and conflict; there are alternatives to violence. The viewer will note the absence of the key characters and architects of Apartheid, the War on Liberation and the creation of the TRC - while their roles were critical to this history, it was how this history played out in the lives of the South African people that was my focus.

Living in the United States, I have always been conscious of racism that is persistently and pervasively present in US culture.

It takes many forms, ranging from the casual and subtle to overt and blatant. I took pride in what my homeland, South Africa had undertaken with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and wanted to explain the process and show it to the world.

I was motivated to expose Americans to the courage of South Africans to make a national effort to examine their ugly past, reveal the truth and acknowledge their history. No such process has ever been undertaken in the US and I believed it would serve the nation well to follow the brave and admirable example of South Africa.

To date, South Africa's TRC process has been the most comprehensive and extensive post-conflict resolution process undertaken anywhere in the world. It is often studied and used as a model by other countries as is South Africa's Constitution which is cited as the most all-encompassing human rights constitution in the world.

My research included books, articles and photos from the SA press, the TRC Final Report and their printed summaries of the major findings. My research assistant, Tanya Gardy, living in South Africa, was an invaluable source for accessing the SA press in an era before newspapers were online. While reading the testimony to the TRC, the horrors, secrets and pervasiveness of the crimes all became very apparent. The subject is epic and the documentation was overwhelming. The deeper I penetrated the information, the more I realised I could be involved with this project for years. In trying to grasp the individual testimonies as well as unravel the historic and legislative backdrop. I felt myself immersed in both the political and physical landscapes of the country, which under Apartheid was like no other.

I knew I had to find ways to visually describe the various aspects of Apartheid - the laws, the socio-economic effects and the cultural divisions that permeated our society and then the War of Liberation which led to a free, democratic South Africa for all. I determined it had to be done in stages and exhibited as a work-in progress, just like forgiveness.

Each phase presented its own unique challenges. In phase I, Apartheid, I struggled with how to visually convey how a country is carved up into separate areas by race with every activity controlled by legislation keeping the groups apart. How would I portray the legislation that created these racial divides? What examples could I use to make this history personal? How does one express the people's pain in dealing with both perpetrators and victims? It was also very important to me to not single out specific people

but to keep it anonymous, yet simultaneously to convey individual suffering and individual culpability.

In conceiving the works I was drawn to different techniques and materials to convey this multiplicity of perspectives and aspects of this history. The materials I used are metaphors for some of the content of the work. The Apartheid landscape was depicted primarily with collage, paint and clay shards allowing me to reflect the mélange of cultures and races, the complexity, layers and diversity of South African society.

I chose to paint imaginary faces even when I was referring to actual cases, with only two exceptions. The day pieces which I used as borders and integrated into some of the pieces, were all individually made, each with their own unique shape. The pieces were used for peoples' names, events, dates and locations all of which I obtained from the TRC Final Report, 1998.

In order to symbolise white domination, I chose to have white text on a black ground and I removed the paint to create the words/ image. For me this was a process metaphor reflecting the forced removals of over three million black South Africans to the Homelands. The use of a border in many of the pieces references the boxed or contained existence separating the races. Finally, the importance of texture and the sonorous use of colour in this first phase of the work reveals the prevailing mood of these tragic and tortured times. Reading volumes of gruesome testimony left me

obsessed with thoughts and images of who these people were. I was haunted by the pain of the victims and the evil of the perpetrators.

There are several 'portrait' drawings that show my own imaginary views of these people and their emotions. These images are imaginary psychological portraits of real people depicting persons who gave actual testimony under oath to the TRC.

Phase II addressed the impact of gross violations of human rights under Apartheid against women and children and how the War of Liberation affected them. Given my interest in issues of relationship and connection I wanted to give voice to women's and children's individual strength and group powerlessness. The TRC held special hearings to induce women to come forward and tell their stories.

For a variety of socio-culture reasons women were extremely reluctant to voice their experiences in the struggle for liberation. Women were both targets and victims of the Apartheid regime as well as within the society at large. Children became involved in the War of Liberation and their organised resistance to Apartheid provided a significant challenge to the South African government.

Notes

- 1 The editor thanks her for informing him of then project and arranging for him to meet the artist.
- 2 Quoted in *WitsReview*, Volume 21, July 2012



Special Branch (27.5" x 18" Mixed Media, 1999) shows the faces of imaginary perpetrators; the acronyms refer to special units of the SADF and the SA Police; to covert operations; torture centres; prisons and operations' headquarters (From Exhibition I: Apartheid)



Target of the Regime 30"x 18" Oil on Canvas (2000) deals with the climate of violence that prevailed in the 1970's and peaked in the late 1980's ultimately forcing the white Nationalist government to unban the black political parties and finally to transition into majority rule by and for all South Africans (from Exhibition II: Impact on Women and Children)



Funeral March (33" x 41" Mixed Media, 1999) commemorates some of those who died in the liberation struggle inside the borders of South Africa. Both overt and clandestine methods to suppress resistance and counter armed actions by opponents of Apartheid were used by the State between 1960–1994 (From Exhibition I: Apartheid)



Propaganda, 24" x 56" Triptych, Oil on Canvas (2002) In South Africa, between 1950-1990, there were more than 100 laws affecting media operations. These ranged from blatant prohibition of publications to the threat of prosecution for printing or broadcasting statements considered subversive (from Exhibition III: Institutional Arrangements)



Mothers of Ten depicts my imaginary view of the grieving mothers of ten black youth, aged 14-19 who were brutally killed on June 26, 1986 by the Western Transvaal Security Branch. The youth who were suspected of being activists, had been recruited by the Security Branch on the pretext that they would receive military training and then were brutally murdered in one of the most notorious cases to appear before the TRC (From Exhibition I: Apartheid).



Should I Testify? (36" x 36" Oil on Canvas, 2000) is about three women attending a workshop and contemplating the decision as to whether to testify before the TRC. The TRC invited representatives of women's organizations and the media to discuss how they could bring more women into the Commission hearing process (From Exhibition II: Impact on Women and Children).

AN I B SINGER RETROSPECTIVE: “THE FAMILY CHRONICLES”: THE MANOR, THE ESTATE AND THE FAMILY MOSKAT

*

Gloria Sandak-Lewin

This is the first of a four-part essay on I.B. Singer's great epic work, *The Manor* (1967), its sequel, *The Estate* (1969) and *The Family Moskat* (1950), which, though “written a few years earlier ... is in a way a continuation of the same saga.”¹

In a pamphlet entitled ‘Isaac Bashevis Singer’ (University of Minnesota Press, 1969), Ben Siegel speaks of “Isaac’s knowledge of ‘the Jewish psyche and culture’” as “deep and ancestral”, and continues, “One of the few writers to have mastered the entire Judaic tradition, he can enter and articulate it at any point without a discordant note.” Siegel recognises that Singer is “essentially his own man as individual and artist. His dignity, compassion, incisive intelligence, and originality are as evident as is his deep dedication to his craft. His unique vision gives to Jewish tradition, history and lore new meanings and applications.”²

Singer avowedly preferred the short story as a literary form, “because only in a short story can a writer reach perfection - more than in a novel”.³ However, it is in the early “family novels” or sagas that we see, between 1863 (the year of the unsuccessful Polish insurrection against Russian rule) and the end of the 19th Century the full sweep and scope of Polish Jewish lore, custom and tradition (*The Manor*, *The Estate*) and the ‘disintegration’ thereof between the 19th Century and the rise of Hitler on the eve of World War II (*The Family Moskat*).

Edward Alexander captures the changes in Jewish society admirably:

We watch the Jews leave the small towns and ghettos for the life of cosmopolitan Warsaw and also Paris and New York. We watch them exchange the long caftan and long hair of the *Chasidim* for the short jacket and short hair (and often shortened memory) of the ‘modern’ Jew, who is sartorially then indistinguishable from

the modern Gentile. We witness the gradual substitution of Polish for the ‘jargon’ of Yiddish as the language of everyday speech. We see young men who were brought up as Chasidim turn into Socialists, Assimilationists, anti-Semites. We watch young women trained to be “pure Jewish daughters” turn into Gentiles, or violent revolutionaries, or adulteresses.⁴

Before discussing the novels in full, perhaps a brief résumé of the main facts of I.B. Singer's life would be appropriate. Born in Leoncin, Poland, in 1904, the third of four children, Isaac's character - its dualities, contradictions, conflicts - was largely moulded by the clash in the personalities of his parents. His father, Pinchas Menachem Singer, was a rabbi and descended from a long lineage of rabbis, and his mother, Bathsheba Zylberman, was herself the daughter of a rabbi. However, his father was a *Chasid*, emotional, other-worldly, impractical, mystical, a dreamer, while his mother was a *Mitnaged*, practical, highly intelligent, rational, down to earth, capable. Florence Noiville, in her very fine biography of Singer, comments perceptively that Isaac's parents were mismatched and that his mother should have been the husband and the husband, the wife:

The two were not so much together, but rather side by side, each cloistered in his or her impermeable world. For Isaac, born into this atmosphere, the message was clear. He would have to create his own inner world quickly, escape and protect himself from others, and rely primarily on himself.⁵

The paradoxes in Isaac's personality have been discussed in full by Paul Kresh; but I shall limit this discussion to one brief quote:

The contradictions in Isaac's nature and in the characters he writes about - the conflicts between the rational and the irrational, the innocent and the worldly, the demonic and the cherubic, the real and the fantastic, the romantic and the conservative - can all be traced to the marriage of his parents and the legacy of a Polish-Jewish past.⁶

Isaac himself has pinpointed the contradictions in his character: while he absorbed his father's stories about miracles, demons and imps (the counterpart to angels), he also inherited his

Gloria Sandak-Lewin, a frequent contributor to Jewish Affairs, is a poet and writer living in Cape Town. She has published two books of poetry, My Father's House (1985, 1997) and My Father's House and Other Poems 1965-1985 (2000), and a collection of short stories A Separate Life: Tales of a Woman Estranged (2006). She has taught, tutored and lectured in English Literature at Herzlia High and the University of Cape Town. This article is the first part of a longer piece, the next installment of which will appear in a future issue of this journal.

mother's skepticism ("The net result is that I remained both a doubter and a man of faith".)⁷

Another important influence on Singer was that of his elder brother, Israel Joshua. Older than Isaac by eleven years, he was a rationalist and secularist who gave his younger brother his first secular book, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (translated into Yiddish) when Isaac was ten or twelve.⁸ Noiville (p56) says that Isaac was twelve at the time while Alexander (p16) gives 1914 as the date when Isaac was given *Crime and Punishment*, which would have made him ten years old.

It was also at the sculptor Ostrzego's studio, where Israel Joshua was hiding to escape enforced Russian military conscription, that the young Isaac, bringing food to him, saw another way of life, diametrically opposed to his father's strict and intense Judaism. Here, he was exposed to young Jewish men and women - the intelligentsia - living freely, without the encumbrances of prayer or prayer books, not observing the laws of *Kashrut* or any other laws, the girls posing in the nude for the artist.⁹

More important, it was his older brother who introduced Isaac to the Warsaw literary world by offering him the position of proofreader on the Warsaw journal *Literarische Bletter* (*Literary Pages*), of which he had become co-editor in 1923.¹⁰ By that time Israel Joshua, disillusioned with communism, had returned to Poland, from Moscow, and his own literary career was flourishing. It was probably because of this position that Isaac had access to the Writers' Club in Warsaw.¹¹ Finally, it was Israel Joshua who, seeing the writing on the wall with the rise of Hitler, emigrated in 1933 from Poland to New York with his wife and younger son, Joseph, and invited the lonely and distraught Isaac to come to America at the beginning of 1935. Isaac became a freelance writer with *Der Forverts* (the Jewish *Daily Forward*), the American Yiddish newspaper for which his brother had been Warsaw correspondent. He would contribute to its columns without a break for forty-five years.¹²

A further factor which was to influence the writer was his residence from 1908 to 1917 (between ages of four and thirteen) at 10 Krochmalna Street, Warsaw. In this regard, Noiville writes:

... Today the only thing that remains of the mythical Krochmalna Street is its name. Almost nothing was spared by the World War II bombings. After the first ghetto uprising in 1943, the Nazis razed the houses. The last survivors were deported to Treblinka or Majdanek. The ground was leveled. A new neighborhood, cold and impersonal, sprang up on the site of the Jewish city.¹³

Noiville comments further that Singer's descriptions of life on this street, his "literary

gold mine", are "all the more precious in that they tell us about a culture on the eve of its disappearance."¹⁴ She asks us to imagine, visualize, reconstruct, the pre-World War I setting that was the world known to Singer:

...the droskys - horse-drawn carriages - trundling over the cobblestones, weaving their way between the traps, the carts filled with cabbages and potatoes; ... the cracking of the coachmen's whips or the clinking of the milk cans in the brisk early morning air; ... the sound of a Yiddish melody being played on an old gramophone between the noises of hammers and sewing machines. In Singer's day, Krochmalna Street was always in the grip of a kind of fever, teeming with life. Artisans, water carriers, furriers, tailors, fruit peddlers, fences, maids, witches ... This was the colorful group of people ... who gave the street its motley flavor. In the converted courtyards of the buildings, children held top-spinning contests. ... [At the end of the street] was the ill-famed Krochmalna Square, the meeting place of thieves, pimps and prostitutes. It was just a few steps away from the synagogues and the Hasidic study houses. Vice was never too far from virtue.¹⁵

Kresh observes that Isaac's observation point of all this activity was "a balcony where he loved to spend his time. This refuge above the street was Isaac's television set, his movie house, his theatre in the round. When he looked down from his perch on the second floor, he felt close to life, close to the teeming action on the sidewalk. There he would spin out his daydreams and think about [eternal] questions"¹⁶ about God, the man-woman relationship and the universe. Needless to say, his observations gave him essential material for his novels and short stories later in life.

A factor, generally overlooked and underestimated, which virtually changed Isaac's adult life and work, was his determined effort to learn English in America. After a year of English classes, he could make himself understood ("I knew that, if I didn't learn this language, I would be lost forever") and some ten years later, though still with a strong Yiddish accent, he was "completely fluent and had an extensive vocabulary."¹⁷

Singer was still determined to write in Yiddish, despite the fact that soon after his arrival in the US he saw that the language had no future in America and despite the later destruction of his major readership in Eastern Europe after the Holocaust. It was through his Warsaw friend, Aaron Zeitlin,¹⁸ writing from Warsaw, that he realised the importance of his work being translated from Yiddish into English since, as Zeitlin advised him, only with translation, would he become a successful writer.

It was thus that after an approximately eight-year period of prolonged writers' block, profound

depression and suicidal tendencies after his arrival in New York, and having been jolted into creative activity by the terrible shock of Israel Joshua's sudden death of a heart attack in February 1944, that Isaac wrote his long and involved family saga *The Family Moskat*, in 1945. Prior to that his first novel, *Satan in Goray*, had been serialised in the Warsaw magazine *Globus* by Zeitlin in 1934 and published in book form in 1935.¹⁹ *The Family Moskat* was serialised in the *Daily Forward* in 1948 and published in English translation (translated by A.H. Gross) by Alfred A. Knopf in 1950. Translations of later novels and short stories were done by Isaac himself with the help of a host of women translators - "Elaine Gottlieb, Mirra Ginsburg, Laurie Colwin, Nancy Gross, Elizabeth Pollett, Elizabeth Shub, Dorothea Straus and Dvorah Telushkin"²⁵ - as well as his nephew, Israel Joshua's son Joseph, who co-translated *The Manor* and *The Estate*.

A further breakthrough came with the publication, in 1953, of the short story *Gimpel, the Fool*, "discovered by two literary critics, Eliezer Greenberg and Irving Howe, [who] were preparing an anthology of Yiddish short stories, [a treasury of Yiddish stories] to be published in English translation." The translation was done by a hard-pressed and very busy Saul Bellow and the story was published in the *Partisan Review* in May, 1953. According to Noiville, "the readers of the *Partisan Review* were immediately captivated" and, although Isaac apparently showed Bellow no gratitude (much to Bellow's chagrin), "it was thanks to Bellow [that] Singer had bridged the gap between Yiddish and English, between the Old World and the New."²⁰

From now on Isaac moved from strength to strength, gaining popularity, fame and wealth, as well as being awarded two American National Book Awards and culminating ultimately in the Nobel Prize for Literature on 10 December, 1978.

Perhaps we should look at a few choice quotations of sayings/utterances by Isaac Bashevis Singer, to give the measure of the man before going on to discuss in the forthcoming second part of this article his "family chronicles", *The Manor*, *The Estate* and *The Family Moskat*.

I B Singer on free will: "The truth is that the belief in free will is a categorical imperative. We cannot live a moment without believing in it." ...²¹

On being a religious writer: "[T]here is a soul and there is a God and there may be life after death. ... I feel that our real great hope lies in the soul and not in the body. In this way I am a religious writer."²²

On the Ten Commandments: "No novel, no poem, and no short story can take the place of the Ten Commandments. It is not enough to read the Commandments. You have to practice them. So

literature will not do the job".²³

On being a writer: "A writer is "an entertainer in the highest sense of the word. A writer should never set out with the vain hope of saving humanity. His job is to tell a good story..."²⁴ "The writer of literature is basically not a teacher, but a teller of tales....";²⁵ "[A] writer should never stray from his roots....The truth is, the more a writer belongs to his own people, the more he belongs to *all* people. A great artist is always part of his nation, its culture, its history, its aspirations";²⁶ "A writer should never abandon his mother tongue and its treasured idioms ..."²⁷

On the Yiddish language (in the introduction to his acceptance speech on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature): "The high honor bestowed on me by the Swedish Academy is also a recognition of the Yiddish language - a language of exile, without a land, without frontiers, not supported by any government, a language which possesses no words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises, war tactics; a language that was despised by both gentiles and emancipated Jews".²⁸

In reply to a question by television host Dick Cavett on 17/7/1978 as to in what respect he considered himself a Jew: "If you ask me really how I am a Jew, I would say that it's a great problem to me, but since I get up in the morning a Jew and I go to sleep a Jew, I dream like a Jew, I speak like a Jew, I suspect that I must have some Jewish blood in me."²⁹

And, in a vein of typically Yiddish tragicomic humor, *on why he is a vegetarian* (he decided to become one in 1962):³⁰ "I am not a vegetarian for the sake of *my* health, but for the health of the chickens. For the animals, every day is Treblinka".³¹

On the man-woman relationship (in an interview by his former translator Laurie Colwin, for the *New York Times Book Review*, 23/7/1978): "If there is love ... there is treachery".³²

And a few selected reasons for why he writes for children: "Number one: Children read books, not reviews. They don't give a hoot about the critics. Number two: They don't read to find their identity.... Number seven: They still believe in God, the family, angels, devils, and witches.... Number nine: When a book is boring, they yawn openly without any shame or fear of authority. Number ten: They don't expect their beloved writer to redeem humanity. Young as they are, they know that it is not in his power. Only adults have such childish delusions."³³

And finally, on death: "At the moment of death, the soul of a simple water-carrier

understands more than the greatest living *Tsadik* [righteous or saintly person.]”³⁴

I conclude with two further quotes. The first reveals the achievement of the man at the height of his popularity, powers and success shortly before he was due to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in Stockholm. Kresh writes:

Isaac has certainly won the allegedly cold heart of the city of Stockholm, conquering all Scandinavia, apparently, with his wit, his charm, his presence of mind. The stooped little man in the black overcoat is a strange sort of hero for the land of the Vikings. And he is entirely conscious of the mythic quality of his popularity here - the *cheder* boy from a Krochmalna Street tenement who made it all the way to the foremost literary honour in the world and soon will be dining with royalty at a banquet table.³⁵

The other anticipates the quality and tenor of Singer, the man and writer, two months before he made his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Writing about the new Nobel Laureate in *The New Republic* (21/10/1978), Maureen Howard predicted: “He will speak as he writes ... as a man who is in touch with his language and his people - the living and the dead.”³⁶

Notes

- 1 I. B. Singer, ‘Author’s Note’ at the beginning of *The Estate* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.)
- 2 Paul Kresh, *Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Magician of West 86th Street: A Biography* (New York: The Dial Press, 1979), pp361-2.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p203.
- 4 Alexander, E, *Isaac Bashevis Singer* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, Division of G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), p83.
- 5 Noiville, F, *Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life*, translated from the French by Catherine Temerson, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, First American Edition, 2006, p13.
- 6 Kresh, p16. For a fuller and amazingly detailed discussion of the paradoxes in I. B. Singer see pp388-9.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p41
- 8 Noiville (p56) says that Isaac was twelve at the time while Alexander (p16) gives 1914 as the date when Isaac was given *Crime and Punishment*, which would have made him ten years old.
- 9 Alexander, p16.
- 10 Noiville, pp.43-4.
- 11 Kresh, p147. According to Joseph, Israel Joshua’s son, Poles and Jews lived so far apart in Warsaw that ‘The Yiddish literary world became a tightly knit family where everyone knew everyone else. There was the Writers’ Club, where they all hung around, ate their meals, made their assignments, even slept - did everything and really led a lively, busy, active kind of life. They had their theatres, their cafés, their clubs. I don’t think they made much money, any of them, and you would think they might have been unhappy, because it was all hopeless, they were all doomed. But there was a kind of spirit of hope and gaiety which cannot be explained by any logical theory. It was the

gaiety and the hopefulness of people who had lost hope.’

- 12 Information partially provided by Alexander, p19.
- 13 Noiville, p18.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp17-18.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp19-20.
- 16 Kresh, p35.
- 17 Noiville, p85.
- 18 “[A] literary idol of Isaac’s whom he met one spring day in 1924 when the two were standing in the only warm place in the Writers’ Club, near a wall heated by an oven in the restaurant next door”, Kresh op. cit. p90.
- 19 Kresh, p117.
- 20 Noiville, pp 92-3.
- 21 Kresh, p351.
- 22 ‘Isaac Bashevis Singer’, interview by Harold Flender in *Fall*, 1968, featured in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, 5th series, 1981, p92.
- 23 Kresh, p351.
- 24 Dvorah Telushkin, *Master of Dreams. A Memoir of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, New York: William Morrow and Co., 1997, p207.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p94.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Ibid.*, p244
- 28 Noiville, p139.
- 29 Kresh, p354.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p234
- 31 Telushkin, p51.
- 32 Kresh, p348
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp381- 382.
- 34 Telushkin, p309
- 35 Kresh, p415
- 36 *Ibid.*, p404

***Best Wishes
for the
Chanukah
Festival of
Lights***

THE LEGEND OF JASCHA HEIFETZ

*

Alan Jacobs

During World War I, Lithuanians voted Vilna as the capital of their newly liberated country. There were about 65 000 Jews in Vilna at the time. The vibrant Jewish life there gave birth to numerous publications in Hebrew and Yiddish. Jews were attached to their homeland and nicknamed Lithuania the ‘Second *Eretz Israel*’, with Vilna as its ‘Jerusalem’.

From the Pale of Settlement there came such remarkable musicians as Ossip Gabrielovitch, Andre Kostelanetz, Hischa Elman, Efrem Zimbalist and the Achron brothers, amongst others.

On 2 February 1901 Jascha Heifetz, the greatest musician that the Pale of Settlement produced, was born, the first child of Reuven and Annie Heifetz. Reuven Heifetz was the concert master of the Vilna Symphonic Orchestra. His position assured the family of a comfortable existence.

Jascha’s upbringing did not have much Jewish content. The Heifetz’s were not concerned about their ethnic roots, although this does not imply that they denied them completely. They were still to undergo a lot of hardship and face numerous obstacles on account of their religion. Their son would inherit this attitude towards his religion, and throughout his life, apart from a short interlude, his own feelings towards Judaism and its traditions were indifferent. It would be the Jewish State – Israel – that would best embody his identity as a Jew.

At eight months, Jascha’s face would shine with joy when his father played a tune on his violin; a false note would make him wince. Reuven bought him a quarter-size violin and when he was three years of age, gave him his first violin lesson. The child showed more than a childish interest in his new toy, and within a few months was showing remarkable promise.

Reuven strove to make a performing artist out of his son. He was a very strict teacher, and would beat the four year-old Jascha for a mistake. At the end of the lesson, Jascha would be confined to his room for many hours to practise scales and exercises. Reuven would rush out and get drunk and on his return would make his son play exercises over and over again. His tyrannical behaviour and constant criticism turned Jascha into an introvert, but strangely enough, this might have contributed

to his becoming a better violinist than had it been otherwise.

Jascha soon required a better teacher than his father. A public appearance was arranged at the local Imperial School of Music, where the five year-old prodigy astonished the large audience and was duly accepted as a pupil with Iliya Malkin. He studied with Malkin for two years and made such rapid progress that again the teacher was left behind. He graduated from the Royal School of Music at the end of the second year. Jascha mastered in three years Mendelssohn’s E minor Violin Concerto. At six he appeared in public again, receiving great ovations. It was through Malkin that the boy met and later studied with the famed Leopold Auer, the greatest teacher he ever had, and one who would shape the final artistic and sonoric qualities for which the future Jascha Heifetz became famous.

Leopold Auer was born into a Jewish family in the small Hungarian town of Vezprem in 1845. He went on to become an internationally renowned violinist and then a professor and noted teacher of the violin. In 1886, he succeeded the famous Polish violinist Henryk Wieniawski as Director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory. During a concert tour visit to Vilna around 1907, he was approached by Malkin for an audition for Jascha. Initially he refused but on the eve of his departure acceded to the request. Jascha played the Mendelssohn violin concerto and the Paganini 24th Caprice. When he had finished, Auer was speechless and his eyes were filled with tears; he said simply that he had never heard such beautiful violin playing and proclaimed the boy the best of all the finest artists he had listened to. After a year and another audition, he accepted Jascha as his pupil.

Reuven was forced to sell his flat in Vilna to pay for the tuition fees and the move to St. Petersburg. On their arrival, Auer at first failed to recognise Jascha. Only after he had given a short demonstration did he remember – the little wonder boy from Vilna! “Enrol him at once. I will teach the boy”.

There was a religious problem. Unless a Jewish family was born in a certain region its members could not settle in the city. Jascha, being a student, could stay in St. Petersburg, but not his father. The problem was overcome by Reuven also enrolling as a student. Jascha was admitted to the conservatory but for the first six months or so had to learn with another teacher. Thereafter, he began

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to study with Auer and later was permitted to attend his master class. This later expanded into private lessons at his house. Financial difficulties arose, but assistance was provided by the society of Jewish Music based in Vilna. Former teacher Malkin was very helpful to the family in financial and other matters.

On 30 April 1911 Jascha gave a concert in St. Petersburg, and afterwards in Kiev, Pavlovsk and Odessa. These were a great success. In September 1912, Jascha performed the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Arthur Nikisch. On another occasion, at a dinner party in his honour, he played the Mendelssohn concerto, accompanied by memory by the famous violinist Fritz Kreisler. After the performance, Kreisler said to the guests (who included several other great violinists): "Well gentlemen, now we can all break our violins...."

These concerts and recitals made the name of Heifetz echo throughout Europe. In 1916, in the midst of World War I, Auer took Jascha and another student to perform in Norway, including on one occasion for the Royal Family at their palace.

At the end of 1916, Jascha sensed the first cracks in his Mother Russia homeland, which was rumbling in anticipation of tragic events to come. Russia was invaded by Germany and the Jews were exiled from Kovno and deported to Vilna. Many were crowded into the town's synagogues and existed in the poorest conditions. The Revolutionary Front spread all over Russia, and incited the population to rebel against Tsarist rule, promising paradise on earth with the new order in the form of Communism. There were food shortages, and as always Jews were regarded as enemies and persecuted. Russia was in chaos. America was the place for Jascha to pursue his career.

In early 1917, the Heifetz's crossed Siberia and went on to Japan, where a concert was arranged, and then continued to San Francisco. Father and son moved to New York, and two months later the family were reunited. Jascha's debut took place on 27 October at Carnegie Hall. He gave a flawless performance, displaying a level of musicianship never before encountered on the concert platform. Musicians and critics were united in their praise of the young genius. Jascha was accepted as a member of the Bohemian Club of New York, which only accepted as members the very great musicians. He had brought a new kind of violin sound and level of perfection never before displayed by any other performer in the country.

In April 1919 the teenage Heifetz, with Sergei Rachmaninoff, took part in benefit concerts at the New York Metropolitan Opera House 'Victory Loan Concert', raising nearly \$18 million to assist paying expenses incurred by the US government during the war. In 1920, he arrived in London and

on 5 May made his triumphant debut in the Queen's Hall. A year later he toured Austria, Germany, Italy, France and a year later Australia and India.

Reuven Heifetz obtained the highest fee for his son, \$2500, while the great Fritz Kreisler earned \$2000 and Rachmaninoff \$1500. On his 21st birthday, Jascha left home and took an apartment in New York City. His accompanist, pianist, Samuel Chotzinoff, married his sister Pauline. Jascha began to collect books and started to read great writers like Dickens, Thackeray, Shakespeare and Byron. He also collected stamps and coins. He came to own during his career the 1714 Dolphin Stradivarius violin, the 1731 'Piel' Stradivarius, the 1736 Carlo Tenoni and the 1742 Guarnerius del Gesu (bought for \$40 000).

In 1924, Heifetz became friends with the two Achron brothers, Joseph and Isador, also from Russia. Joseph emigrated to the Promised Land, but because of the tremendous hardships returned to America. Heifetz listened to Joseph's stories about Palestine and was deeply impressed by what he heard. In 1926, he undertook a journey to Palestine to see for himself what was happening, and gave many concerts during the ten-day visit. The still young settlement had little to offer in terms of musical facilities. Heifetz therefore had to give recitals in the open on improvised podiums (in one Kibbutz, on a kitchen table). Tel Aviv was only 16 years old, just a few streets expanding from Jaffa. There, Heifetz thought, was an appropriate place for building the first music hall, and he donated the fees of the tour to this project. By 1931, the building on 2 Beth Hashpevah Street was finished and called the Jascha Heifetz Hall. For more than twenty years it faithfully served the inhabitants of Tel Aviv. Nowadays, it is used as a third-rank cinema.

In 1928 Jascha married for the first time, to 26 year-old film silent film starlet Florence Arto Vidor. She was reluctant to give up her film career and this led to many arguments and a shaky marriage. In 1930 their daughter, Josepha, was born, and two years later a son, Robert. Neither proved to be musical. Jascha enjoyed the role of father and was a strict disciplinarian.

On Leopold Auer's death in 1930, Heifetz played in memory of his great teacher at the funeral in what many critics described as his most touching and inspired performance ever.

In 1931, Heifetz composed the popular song 'When you make love to me', using the name of Jim Hoyle at the time but later admitting to having written it. In 1933, under Arturo Toscanini, he performed the premiere of a commissioned work, 'The Prophets', by Castelnuovo-Tedesco, whose music appealed to him. That year he toured Palestine for a second time, playing in towns and in remote agricultural settlements. Again, he donated his fees to the cause of improving and helping cultural life of the country. The following year, he toured, Russia and in 1935 Europe, Romania, Austria, France and Britain.

In 1937, Heifetz bought a beautiful house in Beverly Hills and a smaller house on Malibu Beach. On 4 August that year he performed the Mendelssohn Concerto at the Hollywood Bowl before an audience of 17 000. Also during the year he performed, for the first time in America, Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitsky. In 1938, he even appeared in a Metro Goldwyn Mayer film, playing the violin in the musical *They Shall Have Music*. On 7 December 1939, he played the world premiere of a composition he had commissioned, the Violin Concerto by the British composer, William Walton, with the Cleveland Orchestra conducted by Arthur Rodzinski.

Heifetz also had his critics. Some said that he was cold and unemotional. He was severely criticised, in a review of 31 October 1940, by the respected music critic Virgil Thompson. His review was called 'Silk Underwear Music', which was scandalous. It brought to a head the gross misunderstanding and misinterpretation surrounding Jascha Heifetz's art.

Heifetz had been acclaimed by audiences world-wide and also by the great master soloists and conductors. Some critics created a legend about him that made him out to be a cold person. This is an untruthful perception. In private he was warm, charming and lively, an excellent host who loved parties. He was also generous and charitable, often helping needy people. So far as his musicianship went, he played every kind of music brilliantly, never needing to resort to exhibitionism as did many other artists. His music spoke for itself. In later years, Thompson came to terms with Heifetz's artistry.

When America entered World War II, the US army needed recreation and entertainment for its troops. The United States Organisation was founded to take on the job of running the camp shows, and to recruit artists. When USO approached Jascha to perform in military camps, he promptly accepted. Three major overseas tours were planned, in which he was to appear before thousands of soldiers. In between he was scheduled to play in various hospitals for wounded and convalescent fighters. Heifetz undertook his mission with great zeal. He flew to Europe to give recitals, which were held mostly in the open. He donated his services to USO, playing for thousands of servicemen and women around the world, often in dangerous situations. He gave concerts to raise money for US War Bonds and many benefit concerts in France. In 1957, he was raised from officer in the French Legion of Honour to Commander.

In 1945, Jascha and Florence ended their marriage and Florence moved out with the children. Jascha was alone and musically fatigued. In April 1947, he announced that he would take a period of time off from the concert stage. That period lasted till January 1949.

In 1946, Jascha married again to Frances Spiegelberg, a 35 year-old divorcee. From both marriages, there were five sons, with one – Joseph – from the second marriage. In 1947 the couple went on the Queen Mary to Britain, where Heifetz recorded two concertos. In 1947, he performed the world premiere of Erich Korngold's Violin Concerto, another work commissioned by him; Korngold was a Jewish composer, who had fled from Nazi Germany to America. He played the Sibelius Violin Concerto regularly, and was largely responsible for its ensuing popularity.

In 1950, Heifetz returned to Palestine, now the state of Israel, having been invited by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. He was astonished to find the newly born state in a fever of building and developing, active and bursting with energy. He spent four weeks there, visiting and performing in many places. His first concert, on 17 May in Ohel-Shem Hall in Tel Aviv, won him lavish praise and rave reviews in the papers. One critic, Mr Rosenblum tried to bring him down, describing Heifetz as a cold, emotionless performer. The public took no notice of this article, and their applause showed that, he was not only among his family people, but the favourite among them as well. Heifetz found the Galilee attractive. He played in Sfat, in Kibbutzim, Northern Galilee and in Ein Harod. He also played in Eilat, which was attended by many soldiers of the Israeli Defence Forces, including General Moshe Dayan. He regarded the latter as the most beautiful place he had ever performed in. The farewell concert took place on 20 May in Ohel-Shem Hall. Heifetz played the Beethoven Violin Concerto, with Leonard Bernstein conducting the IPO. It was the only time that the two musicians ever collaborated.

Heifetz returned to Israel 31 March 1953 with his son Robert, who was appointed by Ohio College to do research on the life on the Israeli Kibbutzim. On 1 April, in a recital at Haifa, he included the violin sonata of Richard Strauss, thus defying a ban on the German composer. Richard Wagner's music was also banned in Israel. The Minister of Education, Professor Dinur, wrote him a letter urging him not to play this work, which might offend many in the audience. This plea was ignored and the Strauss Sonata was played, after which there was silence and no applause. He repeated the performance of the Strauss Sonata in Haifa and Jerusalem. Public opinion was sharply divided, with some claiming that politics and music should not be mixed while others condemned Heifetz for his lack of consideration for the people who had survived World War II. "The music is above these factors", claimed Heifetz, "I will not change my programme. I have the right to decide on my repertoire."

In Jerusalem, many anonymous phone calls were received, warning Heifetz not to play Strauss there. Just before the concert, he received two telegrams, one signed by the Heruth Movement,

the other by Betar Jerusalem, which read: "We urge you to avoid playing the Compositions of that Nazi composer, in the Eternal Capital of Jerusalem". At the end of the Strauss sonata, some unknown people took over the theatre's control room and disconnected some electrical fuses, plunging the hall into total darkness. The recital was held up for ten minutes.

Afterwards, Heifetz left the King David Hotel, carrying his violin case. As he stepped outside, a tall young man rushed up, muttered something and hit him with an iron bar before vanishing into the darkness. The perpetrator was never found. Fortunately, Heifetz was not seriously injured. The incident made headlines in the newspaper, and Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion sent a telegram of sympathy.

Despite announcing he would play Strauss again in the following concert, he did not do so. The ban on Strauss and Wagner continued, and for many years not one official invitation was extended to Heifetz. The rift between him and the State of Israel seemed unbridgeable.

The twilight of the 1955-56 season was Heifetz's performance at Carnegie Hall. Thereafter, he announced that he intended to curtail his concert appearances. His recitals duly became fewer and at sixty years of age he decided to gradually withdraw. During 1960, he and the famous cellist Gregor Piatogorsky formed a musical partnership and periodically appeared in America, but the following year he withdrew from concerts altogether. His second marriage also ended around this time.

Heifetz enjoyed his retirement, playing tennis, sailing boats and, later, involved himself with environmental ecology. He became a teacher of the violin, giving tuition to promising young students, and was appointed regent professor of music at the University of Southern California.

In 1967, Heifetz offered to appear at the Hollywood Bowl with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, who extended to him a formal invitation to tour Israel. In May 1970, he and the Piatogorsky landed at Lod Airport. The concert in Jerusalem was followed by a dinner, given in their honour by Prime Minister Golda Meir, which Heifetz did not attend. The two artists toured the country and gave a joint concert at the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv.

Heifetz used the vibrato brilliantly. This is the deliberate and controlled use of oscillating the left hand fingertip which makes the sound rattle and vibrate. He introduced a new notion in his playing, subtly finesse, delicacy, clever in insinuation. He exercised self-restraint of feeling and a clever avoidance of slipping into the usual pattern of overdosed sentimentalism.

On 23 October 1972, Heifetz gave a rare recital at the Los Angeles Music Centre for the benefit of the scholarship funds at the Southern California School of Music. This was his last public performance. Later, alone in his dressing

room, he put the Guarnerius del Ges violin to rest in its silk-covered case for the last time after a public concert. Thereafter, he withdrew into his little beach house by the ocean. It was not sound proof. Inside he would carefully close all the windows and draw down the blinds. Then the Heavenly Melody would again take possession of him. Rarely, lucky passers-by might have heard it. Jascha Heifetz died in Los Angeles in December 1987, aged 86.

In the final analysis, the best people equipped to comprehend and appreciate the contribution to the art of violin playing brought about by Jascha Heifetz would be his fellow musicians. These are generally united in their view that Heifetz was the supreme violinist. Henryk Szering refers to him as the 'emperor', while David Oistrakh used to say, "There are many violinists - then there's Heifetz!" Arturo Toscanini, who had heard the greatest violinists such as Josef Joachim, Pablo de Sarasate, Bronislav Huberman, Fritz Kreisler and Yehudi Menuhin, maintained that Heifetz was the best of them all. Isaac Stern, another famous violinist, said of him, "Heifetz represents a standard of polished execution unrivalled in my memory by any violist by book or by persona knowledge".

Jascha Heifetz's career spanned some seventy 70 years and his art influenced at least two and maybe three generations. Itzhak Perlman acknowledges the great influence he had on him in his formative years, while Frank Sinatra said that he had been amongst the one or two people who had most influenced and shaped his way of singing and interpretation. For the conductor Zubin Mehta, he had been his favourite violinist. And the pianist Arthur Rubinstein said of him, "Heifetz is one of the most uncannily educated, fascinating virtuosi, most beautifully timbered violinist of this time, before which Paganini must pale, full of envy".

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FROM ENGLAND TO THE CAPE, 1890

*

Gita Gordon

Pesach ... the family sitting around the table on one side the boys Jack, David, Joseph, Samuel and Isaac. The girls sat opposite. Frieda, Bertha, Ethel and Rose. At the head of the table, her husband, Pinchas, the only member of the family to retain the name he was called by in the shtetl. The children had been given their new names on the day they had begun school. She had changed very gradually, from Feigy to Fanny. But Pinchas remained Pinchas

At that moment the sound that Fanny dreaded began, her husband gasping for breath. The children were silent. They too knew what this meant. Fanny fought to keep calm, fought to help her husband to breathe normally. Fear coursing through her, she spoke soothingly to him. Fanny called for Frieda to bring a cup of steaming water to place before him. Slowly he began to take short breaths, and as she spoke soothing words to him, his ragged breathing became normal.

Fanny said, "This has gone on for long enough. We are going to the doctor."

As usual, Pinchas responded with, "What will we use for money, to pay him?"

Two days later Fanny went to the pawn shop. She took her Shabbos dress, the last remaining memory of the place they had left behind, and glanced at the pitiful few coins she had obtained. Soon they would be gone, to pay the doctor. Then she went home and together with a still protesting Pinchas, made her way to the small end terrace where the doctor had his rooms. The rain had become a soft drizzle and they removed their wet outer garments and sat on the old wooden chairs. To their surprise, the room was empty. Did that mean the doctor was away? Then there was a clatter of footsteps, a young boy ran out and they heard the doctor's voice. "Next".

The walk through the rain, had not been good for Pinchas, and once again he began to gasp for breath.

"Ah, so that's the trouble is it?" said the doctor. "And if I am not mistaken this has been going on for some time now. Correct?" Fanny answered in the affirmative, as Pinchas was unable to do anything but struggle to breathe. "Why didn't you come to me earlier?"

Fanny looked at him wordlessly. How could she explain the hopelessness of their situation? Since arriving in this forsaken place from their small *shtetl* in Lithuania Pinchas, the proud carpenter, no longer worked for himself, but for others. He spent his hours in a room packed with people, and wood, and dust, and glue, and at the end of the week received a pittance. They lived in two small rooms. There never seemed to be sufficient money for food, let alone clothing for the children, and a day away from work meant less money, the risk of no job at all. What then?

The doctor continued without waiting for a response. "There is nothing I can do, so I don't suppose it makes any difference. What he needs is a warm climate, not this rain and fog and cold. It's the colonies he needs, somewhere like the Cape Colony. Yes, that's it, the Cape Colony. Got a letter just last week from a young man - couldn't do anything for him either. Now a year later he writes that in the Cape he is quite free from problems. Making a good living too, it seems. That's my advice to you. Go to the colonies. Sixpence please. Next".

Fanny handed over the money, and they left. The waiting room was empty. She wanted to sit down and remain sitting. What use to her was the doctor's advice? Her Shabbos dress gone, for useless advice? How could she travel with a sick husband and ten children on a ship to a strange place? Where would they find the money? How could she endure another sea voyage traveling steerage? The journey to England had been horrific, but they had been young and healthy and full of hope and the journey had only been for five days. The Cape Colony was so far away. How long would such a journey take? No,

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it was out of the question. Pinchas had never been ill in Kovno. They would return to Kovno. There he would get well. There he would once again work for himself. Yes, it was time to go home. She had been writing falsely cheerful letters to her mother ever since they had arrived. Now was the time to tell the truth.

First, they must get home. Then she must make food for the children, from what? The money was gone. The doctor had it. They walked home slowly. They opened the door and heard the oldest two boys talking.

"Don't tell mother we didn't go to school this afternoon." Jack's voice came from the corner of the room," and in reply his brother David: "What, how then will we explain where we got these vegetables?"

"Listen, just say we met old man Cohen and he gave them as a present. No need for anyone to know we helped with the horses and the deliveries."

"Can we go again?"

Just then the boys became aware that they were no longer alone. "Never lie to me. Is that clear? Never lie to me ever again" Fanny lashed out. This was just too much for her. What kind of children was she bringing up here? No, they must leave and the sooner the better.

The bundle of vegetables lay by the side of the small stove. Well that was one problem solved. "Tell me how you helped, while I use what you brought home to make soup. Tell me everything. How long has this been going on? David, you help your father to bed. He isn't well. Jack stand here, and tell me what you have been up to."

Jack stretched out his hand and gave his mother three shiny pennies. "We help every Thursday afternoon. We write a note to the teacher and say we have to stay home, we write down your name on it." Fanny took the money and called out. "David, when your father is settled run to the butcher and ask for bones for the soup. The girls will be home from school soon. I don't want them to hear what you have been up to. Jack, you stay here."

Jack knew that now everything would have to be told. He wished his mother hadn't heard his words. He wished...oh what was the use of wishing. He began to talk, dreading the consequences.

"It began when school started last year. We always passed the stables just as Mr. Cohen was taking the horses out. So, well, you know how I like horses, well so, the one horse was giving trouble and I patted it and I stroked it and then Mr. Cohen harnessed it while I was talking. Then on my way home from school that day he said he could do with some help, especially on Thursday afternoons when he goes to the smart areas on the West Side. So then I started helping. Then one week I didn't go. It was fun riding on the cart, but I was worried, about the teacher noticing that every week on a Thursday I was away. So then when I was passing by the next day Mr. Cohen spoke to me. He said it made everything go much more quickly when I rode with him, and he was making more money and he would pay me if I could bring another boy along. Well, that's when David came along also."

"How come today you brought vegetables. Why never before?" Fanny said, looking at the pile next to the sink.

"Oh no, we always got vegetables, the leftovers, the ones he couldn't sell, but usually we met the girls on the way home from the market and they just added it to their bundles."

Fanny felt as if she wanted to faint. The whole family was leading a life of deceit and she was blind to it.

"What about the money? You said he agreed to pay you."

"Yes, thruppence a time, for each of us."

"And what did you do with the money?"

Now there was a pause. It grew longer.

"Tell me. I'm asking you. Food he gave you, and you brought it home. What did you do with the money?"

"Stamps" was the answer.

"What do you mean, stamps? Who do you write to?"

"No, stamps that have already been used. People collect stamps. My teacher told us one day. He showed us his stamp collection. So I found the shop where you can buy them. I bought a few, but then I thought of a better idea. I used the money for tram fare. I traveled to the places where men work in big rooms. I asked from room to room asking if they threw away their letters with stamps and they did, so then I asked if they would keep them for me. Some said they would, and each week I go and collect them".

"For these useless stamps, you work?"

"Yes, and I put them in my book, a special book for stamps, in a special way so that the stamps are not spoiled, so they are worth money."

"That book is worth money?"

"Oh yes, definitely, lots and lots," Jack said confidently.

Could it be true? How much money could it be worth? Sufficient to pay for the fare to the Cape Colony? No, surely not. Sufficient to pay half, or a quarter? No, that couldn't be possible. But it was

clearly worth something. How much? Where to get a fair price? How to tell Jack he would have to part with it? What would tickets cost? Not steerage, but third class. She had heard people talk. There was third class. It was simple but acceptable, not like steerage, where there was no separation between men and women, and the food doled out from large buckets. She had endured that for four days on the voyage to London. She could not endure it for four weeks as the ship made its way far down south. More to the point, Pinchas would not survive such a voyage. The money would have to be found and quickly, sufficient money so that though they would travel steerage, Pinchas would not.

The following morning as the children walked to the door she pulled Jack back. "No, today you will come with me. Go get your book, the one with the stamps, the one you say is worth money."

Jack came a few moments later with his precious stamp album. He looked none too happy. Fanny felt a moment of pity for him. Then she thought of the deception he had engaged in, and she hardened herself and said, "Come. We will first go to the shipping lines and find out how much the fare is to the Cape Colony. Then we will go to that stamp shop you spoke about, and see what the book is worth."

Fanny hoped that by speaking confidently she would feel some sense of hope. In truth she felt only fear and hopelessness. The shipping offices were not easy to find. It involved asking many people, until at last someone directed them to the correct address. Once there her courage almost failed her when she saw the notice on the wall: "Castle Line. EXTRA INTERMEDIATE STEAMER FOR LONDON. TO CAPE TOWN. Leaving on the 9th October. Calling at Madeira. Fare Guineas first, 23 Guineas second and 10 Guineas third class. Steerage 2 Guineas".

That would be in five days-time. Five days. That could be easily done, there was so little to pack, but where would she find 110 guineas? Perhaps for children they would charge less? Feeling that the world was crashing down on her, but with nothing to lose Fanny walked up to the heavy wooden counter, where a bored looking clerk was standing.

"What is the fare, third class, for children?" she said pointing at the sign.

"How many, what ages?"

Fanny reeled off their ages.

"You mean that ship, the one leaving on Wednesday?"

"Fanny nodded, it was hopeless, but still she nodded.

"Well we have two cabins left, small ones, each with three bunks. If you could all fit in there, the children sleeping two to a bunk I could do it for sixty guineas. But I will need the money today. I can't keep it for you. First come first served it is."

Fanny mumbled. I will be back soon. "Sixty guineas was better than 110, but still an impossible sum. "Come, now we go to that stamp shop" She said to Jack. The walk seemed endless. Eventually they came to a narrow lane. "Here we are" said Jack and walked up a flight of narrow, dirty steps.

The shop was small. The man behind the counter seemed to emerge slowly from the gloom. Jack placed his precious stamp album on the counter. "How much will you pay me for this?" he said. He knew the true value of the book. He talked about his new acquisitions with his schoolteacher, and then carefully tallied it up. The man looked through the book. It appeared he was carelessly flipping through, but years of practice meant that he could rapidly assess the value of anything placed before him. "Ten quid" he said.

Jack wanted to grab the book back. "Mother, it is worth much more. Please can we take it and go now?" he said. Fanny nodded. Disappointment seeped through her. Such unrealistic hopes she had nurtured for a short while. As they went out the door she said to Jack, in despair, "Where will we get sixty guineas?"

The man heard only the words "sixty guineas". Had someone else offered them such a vast sum? Perhaps he should have looked more carefully. Perhaps there had been something of great value he had missed. In any event, the true price of the book was about that. Had he made a mistake by offering such a low price?"

"Young man", he called out, "Perhaps I should look again at the book".

Jack was angry. The man was trying to cheat him. It was bad enough to be forced to give up his collection, but to be swindled in such a fashion. That was unbearable. He would go to his schoolteacher. He would see if he wanted to buy some of the stamps. Perhaps he would know of others who would buy. It would take time, but he would not be swindled in this manner. "No. I know where to get the price I want. We will not do business, you and I".

The confident tone of the boy made the man even more determined. Clearly, he had missed a bargain. "Sixty guineas" he had heard. So that was what they had already been offered. He would offer a bit more. He would get his hands on that book.

"Sixty two guineas I'll give you. I am just a sentimental fool, but it seems to be you me that you are in need of the money, and the heavens will reward me for my good deed."

Jack couldn't work out what caused this sudden change, but this was clearly a good sale, a sale worth making, though it pained him to part with his collection. He turned around, placed the book on the counter, and held it down firmly. "I accept. Sixty-two guineas you said. I will take it now."

The money and the book changed hands. Fanny and Jack made their way back to the shipping office,

and paid the fare. For both, the day was beginning to take on an air of unreality. Like sleepwalkers they handed over the money, accepted the tickets and made their way out of the office.

They walked side by side, silently, each with their own painful thoughts. Jack was elated at the good price they had received for his album, and amazed by the fact that he alone had paid the fares for all his family. At the same time he was devastated by the loss of his fine collection. Then he began to think of a sea voyage and a new land. Excitement began to build up, slowly pushing away all thoughts of his stamps.

Fanny was afraid. Afraid of the decision she had made on her own, without even involving Pinchas. Would the sea voyage be too much for him? Would he be cured in that faraway land? Would there be a need for men of his trade? What would their fate be? Fanny waited until the children were asleep, the house quiet. Then she said to Pinchas, "Soon you will be well. We are going to the Cape Colony where the sun always shines and you will recover there. The doctor said so."

Pinchas, exhausted from work, gray faced, tired beyond endurance, said weakly, "But money?"

Fanny was relieved that it hadn't been an outright "no". She said, "We have a clever son. Do you know that Jack has been collecting old used stamps? Worthless, wouldn't you think? But no, they are worth money, a lot of money. So they have been sold and now we are booked to leave next week on a fine ship. Not like we traveled here, all together at the bottom of the ship, but in two fine cabins. Now what do you think of that?"

"Good boy Jack" wheezed her husband

By Tuesday night everything was ready for departure. The fine wooden trunk was filled to the brim with their goods. The children were neatly dressed. They had missed school for that day to help with the preparations. On their last day at school, Fanny had seen to it that each child handed their teacher a letter thanking them and wishing them farewell.

Now all they had to do was make their way to the place on the Thames where their boat was docked. It would leave before dawn the next day and passengers had been told to board the previous evening. This was a new venture. Ships usually left from Southampton. The captain of the vessel wanted the boarding to be done under cover of the night, and the navigating on the river to be done, on the following day, before dawn, while there was little traffic. It had been arranged with Jack's erstwhile employer, the vegetable seller, to take the family and their baggage to the place on the Thames where the ship was docked. He arrived at the end of his working day as dusk arrived and just as Fanny was beginning to think he would let them down. Soon the family and their goods were piled on the wagon and heads poked out of windows and waved their goodbyes.

The ship was waiting on the Thames. The adventure that lay before them became a reality. They crowded into the two small cabins, and after some time, tired by the long day, they fell asleep.

The children woke, whispering to one another that surely the ship was moving. The rocking of the ship was different, no longer so gentle. The noise outside was of the cawing of sea gulls. From the portholes, a stiff breeze blew into the cabins.

Fanny peered into the next-door cabin and saw Pinchas was just waking. She put her hand to his head and was relieved to find that there was no fever

After weeks of living on the rocking waves of the sea, it was the stillness that woke Fanny. The ship hardly seemed to be moving. She quietly went to the small porthole and then saw a sight that made her gasp. All around, the water was still. In the distance the sun was not yet risen, but a cool gray color shimmered over everything and beyond the sea was land, palm trees, and behind them buildings and then, like the back drop of a stage, a tall mountain with a flat top, and slowly coming over the mountain, a thick white cloud.

Fanny peeped in to the next cabin and saw the Pinchas was sleeping peacefully. In spite of the crowded conditions, he was looking better. His breathing was normal. Color had returned to his cheeks. He had even gained some weight, in spite of the dull, monotonous fare that had been provided.

Fanny had spent the previous night making sure that the outfit for each child was spruce, clean and ironed. She had laid them carefully one on top of the other in a corner she had cleared specially for this purpose. Now she took her own outfit and dressed quickly and went on board. Only a few passengers were there, but the sailors were everywhere, moving swiftly, quietly, from deck to rigging

A woman came up to her. "So good to be back", She said, "You are new here? I have been away for more than a year, but now at last I have returned. See there, Table Mountain is getting a tablecloth. That means the South-Easter will be blowing today, clearing the air of all bad miasmas. We call the wind the Cape Doctor. It keeps us well, better than any quack with his potions and lotions."

Now, Fanny hurried down, back to their cabins. She felt young again, invigorated, ready to start a new, good life. The doctor said Pinchas would be well in the Colonies.

On the deck above, as the ship slowly began to dock, Fanny, Pinchas and the children stood spellbound and silent gazing at the mountain, the cloud cover, the small houses on the hillside, and the great waving palm trees on the shore line.

By the time the ship had reached the harbor wall the sun had risen. On the quayside a scurrying mass of humanity in a variety of clothing and differing skin hues moved around in seeming chaos. Yet the

ship was brought to the side and tied up, and the anchor was dropped, and the gangplank fixed into place with great efficiency. People below were shouting now, calling out names of their family, suddenly spotting someone, and waving frantically. Oh, how Fanny wished there was someone to call to them in that way.

They set about getting their things together and leaving the ship. A sailor called at their cabin and offered his assistance. Soon they were on the quayside in a huge building with a fierce official questioning them. However, he seemed to find their papers in order and their answers satisfactory and then they were through the ordeal of customs and surrounded by a hubbub of voices. A man came up to them and said. "New here? Need a ride with your things? Need a place to go to?" Barely waiting for an answer he swooped down and lifted up their wooden trunk. "Wait here. I'll be back for the rest of the things", he shouted out.

Fanny felt a sense of panic at seeing the trunk disappear into the crowd. "Jack, David, go with him, Follow him. Wait with our things until we come", she said. The boys, bored with all the process of landing, scooted after him. They were from the East End of London. Such crowds they were used to. They found the man loading their trunk onto a cart. He spotted them and shouted down, "Right young fellows, run to your parents, and say we will be with them in a minute".

"David, why is he standing on the cart, the reins in his hands? He looks as if he wants to leave straight away. Why isn't he sitting down, waiting?" Jack hissed at his brother.

David looked up, troubled by the same thought. "What do we do now?"

Jack was already moving towards the horses, making low soothing noises, patting them gently, and moving his hands towards the harness.

"Quickly get mother. Tell her to leave everything and come here."

Now he was loosening the harness, almost completely so that only a bit of leather remained inside.

The man was shouting at him now. "Get away from the horse. He will hurt you. Horses bite and kick, you know."

"Don't worry about me," Jack shouted up. Horses I know about. Now his hand was moving to the other side of the bridle, repeating the process. Slowly, very slowly, he moved downwards, working as fast as he could, until the man shouted. "Stand away, or you will be hurt." Jack smiled to himself but followed the instructions. The man picked up a whip and made a great cracking sound over the animal. The horse pulled away, and suddenly the man was being pulled off the cart pulled along the ground, shouting in pain and calling out, "Whoa! Whoa!"

Just at that moment Fanny and David arrived. Jack gave a piecing whistle, and the horse came to a halt. It seemed that horses in this place responded to the same signals as they had in London. The man got to his feet. His clothes were torn. His face and knees were scraped. "What the dickens were you doing to my horse?" he said.

A crowd had gathered now, and were watching and listening.

"Me?" Jack said, "What could I possibly do to your horse? Looks to me as though you didn't do a very good job with the harness and reins."

Fanny saw Jack look at her and wink. She took up the matter. "Where were you going? You have our trunk there, and you said you were coming back for us. Where did you think we would all fit in? Seems to me that the cart is only big enough to hold the trunk"

The man looked unhappy. The crowd was following every word.

After some moments the man answered, "My mate. Oh I was going for my mate, to bring another cart to collect the rest of you."

"Well now. I will wait here. You better walk, while we remain with the cart. Fetch your mate, and his cart, and then we can all set off together, with my boys on your cart and the rest on the other one."

"Right. I'll just see to the harness and go off and get him." Fanny realized that their trunk was only standing safe on the cart because Jack had somehow managed to loosen the harness, holding the horse to the cart. Once they were reconnected, the man would surely take off, never to be seen again.

"No. My boy will make a better job of it then you did. You can walk to your friend. We will wait here with the cart, and our trunk."

Suddenly there was a cry. "My horse and cart! It disappeared from the gates. I have been looking everywhere for it. How did it get here?"

It seemed as if the man with the torn suit was there one moment, and simply disappeared like a puff of smoke the next.

Now the crowd began giving advice.

"Chase him. He was trying to steal. Every time new immigrants arrive they come and steal from them".

"What about stealing from me? What about stealing my horse and cart?" the recent arrival shouted.

A well-dressed man walked up to the crowd. His authoritative manner made everyone quiet down.

"What is going on here?" he said.

Fanny felt that at last someone had taken charge of an impossible situation. Quietly, she explained

what had occurred.

"We won't catch him now" he said, "Lucky he didn't get away with your things. I came here to collect my cousins, and all I found was a passenger with a note to explain they had changed their mind, and used the money I sent them to go to America instead. So here I am, with a cart big enough for you and your luggage. Do you have more family members? Where are they?" Fanny pointed to Pinchas and the other children standing a little way off. "Right, young lad," He said to Jack, "You go and collect them and soon we will be getting you away from all this."

In this way, Fanny and her family were taken to a house in Kloof Street, a place prepared for a family to stay, with beds made up and food in the larder.

When rental was spoken of the man said, "For this week you are my guests. Later I will come and we will discuss how you will earn a living, and what you will pay for rent. Rest now from your unpleasant experience this morning. Were Jews not set upon the earth to be of help to one another?"

Later, much later, when the children had been taken for a walk to see their new surroundings, when some of their goods had been unpacked, when Fanny had made a good meal, Pinchas said to Fanny, "It seems that the time of miracles has not passed. Here we are in a fine home, with food and bedding provided, and we only have to begin paying rent next week. But where am I to find work? What will happen if there is no work for me?"

Fanny had been thinking similar thoughts, but she smiled and said, "If there are no more miracles, then we will have to make a plan. Are you not the finest of carpenters? As soon as you are well, you will find work. The doctor told you that you should live in a warm place, and that you should rest for some time until the cough has disappeared. Tomorrow that fine gentleman will come and speak to us of how a living can be earned. I am fit and well. The sea voyage was a wonderful holiday for me. Until you are well, I will earn for us, just as we have done in the past. Then, when you are well again you will find work."

With those words, Fanny knew that in this new country she would have to be the breadwinner. She looked for courage from her small book of *tehillim*. While the household slept, and the sounds of the street drifted into the house, she sat by the light of a candle and read verse after verse, until at last, there was a spluttering sound and then darkness, and reluctant to use another candle, she ended her first day in the new land.

CLINGING BLACKJACKS

*

Zita Nurok

When Anne and her family had taken the cable car up Table Mountain in Cape Town for the first time, it had been an exciting adventure.

"D'you think there are snakes at the top, Mom?" Jon had asked.

"We probably won't see any if there are," she'd replied. He always used to ask that question when they went for walks in the Drakensberge or in the Cape forests.

"What if that cable snaps?" their younger son Philip had asked, warily eyeing the cable car traveling slowly toward them in mid-air. "Or if it just stops, or if..."

And her husband Ivor had ruffled Phillip's hair and said, "Why are you thinking of all the things that can go wrong? You'll love this. We all will." He'd put his arm around Anne's shoulders as he often used to do.

Now the boys were grown and they'd left South Africa. Philip was a doctor living in Israel with his wife and young son, and Jon worked for a computer company in the United States. Ivor had passed away four years before, and after she'd spent a difficult time trying to adjust to his absence, Anne had decided to return to teaching in a private primary school in Sea Point. She enjoyed living at the seaside, but there were many days when she sat on the balcony of her small flat which overlooked the white sandy beach, wishing that she too could be out there playing ball, or walking her dog like the people she was watching, or simply talking about the weather with a friend. Many of her close friends and family had left South Africa and were now living in Israel, Canada, the USA, or Australia. Attending services at

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the synagogue was different for her after they all emigrated. She missed the warm get-togethers with good friends and family, the delicious Shabbat meals with home-baked challah that they each took turns making. No longer did anyone stop by to visit on weekends.

It was the last day of the December school holidays. Anne decided to go up Table Mountain by cable car again. She drove her small car to the foot of the mountain, where she parked and joined the waiting group. An Indian lady ahead of her in the queue turned and smiled. "A bit misty this morning isn't it?" She drew her gold and pink sari around her slim shoulders.

"Yes, I hope we can still go up," Anne replied.

"Yesterday, it was cancelled because of the wind," the lady told her.

"Oh really... where are you from?" Anne asked, "Are you on holiday here in Cape Town?"

"We're from Durban and we're here in Cape Town for one more week." She smiled, and looked proudly at her four children. Her husband acknowledged Anne shyly.

"That's where I lived a long time ago," Anne told her. They chatted easily until it was their turn to buy tickets. Anne pushed her money through to the man on the other side of the window. His long, dark tanned hand with dirty fingernails reached for the rand notes.

"How many?"

"Just one please."

She walked through the turnstile, and handed her ticket to a young man. The Indian family had moved to the other side of the group that was forming to use the cable car. Anne would have preferred to be with them, but when they walked out to the place from which the cable car would leave, she found a spot beside three teenagers instead. She turned to look at the mountain. They all waited on an open cement ledge that faced onto it. Everyone could see the two cable cars ahead as they descended, traveling towards them. There was a space beside the ledge where one of the cars would come to rest. Anne looked up.

The mountain seemed bigger than she remembered, and closer too. A cloud hovered to the left and above it, as if deciding whether to settle over the top or move on. It seemed to Anne that the scene had been more beautiful years ago. Now the mountain looked tired and gray in the hazy light. A large eagle dipped and swooped hesitantly over the pine forests ahead. It appeared to be looking for something.

Her attention was drawn to a large black wheel, which squeaked as it rotated slowly in the space beside the ledge. Three thick black greasy cables reached out from it to the cable car, like long grasping fingers. The wheel groaned.

I shouldn't have come, Anne thought, I should have driven with Sally to Groot Constantia for tea and scones instead. It's beautiful there too.

"Stay clear of the cable car," the ticket collector called out, "My name is Johan and I will be taking you up."

The car was descending into the open space. Like a taped recording she heard the man inside that car say to his group, "Wait until the car comes to a complete stop and alight from the left, please," People filed out.

Anne climbed in with her group and stood beside Johan, who locked the gate. She smiled at him, wanting to say something. "Have you worked at this for long?" she asked.

"All summer ma'am," he replied in a heavy Afrikaans accent. He turned to the teenagers who addressed him. The car began to move upward. Anne stared out at the scene ahead. She gripped the steel pole beside her and closed her eyes.

"What's the matter, lady?" one of the boys asked her.

"Oh...nothing, I'm fine" she smiled weakly. They seemed to be suspended in mid-air. Was the car moving? She couldn't tell. Her legs felt weak when she looked out. Nothing was below, above, to the left or right of them, only the hazy sky ahead, mountain slopes, and the indecisive hovering cloud.

She thought back to the first time her family had taken the cable car up Table Mountain. She remembered how excited her children had been when they spotted different birds.

"Hey Mom, look at that wild bird," Jon had said, "What kind is it?"

Ivor had used the binoculars she'd given him for his fiftieth birthday. "Spectacular!" he'd exclaimed, "A Cape Sugarbird. Look at its beautiful long tail, Anne!"

Now their car continued to move up slowly. Another sailed down on the singing cables beside them. When it passed opposite, they were only about half way up. Anne's heart raced. A gentleman beside her took photos. People around her were commenting enthusiastically on the spectacular view. Out in the distance, she saw three mountain climbers. Anne wished she too could feel the rocks under her feet, or hold onto them with her hands.

"Look at all the wild flowers and pine forests, children," she'd said to her boys long ago, "Those shining trees are Silver Leaf."

"And what a view of the coastline!" Ivor had handed her the binoculars, and she too had exclaimed at the way the land seemed to flow right into the blue waters.

Anne closed her eyes again as her thoughts were jolted back by the movement of the cable car that seemed to be swaying in the air. When she looked out seconds later, the pine forests were well below

and now only sheer rock loomed ahead. They were surely heading straight into it and would be smashed to pieces. She clenched her fists as they moved vertically up, almost against the face of the rock. But suddenly she saw a ledge and an empty space, and

it was all over. The car bumped sharply to a stop.

"Stay clear of the cable car," the ticket collector outside said.

"Wait until the car comes to a complete stop and alight from the right please," Johan stated automatically.

Anne climbed out shakily. The cement floor felt firm under her feet. People scattered in all directions, chattering excitedly. The Indian family had disappeared. She walked past a cafeteria where souvenirs and snacks were sold, into bright sunlight. The breeze had died down and the cloud drifted away. Anne breathed deeply of the fresh clear air, and found a bench on which to rest in the warm sun for a while. There was a good view of the whole peninsula, three thousand feet below. She could see the coastline with a clear demarcation between the warm and cold water of the oceans. They appeared calm. Waves like rows of dancing children gently ran up on the beach. Boats that looked like toys appeared far out in the water. She stood up to explore the mountaintop.

Once more her thoughts returned to years past. "Hey, Dad," Jon had said, "what's over the edge? Can we see, can we?"

"Yes let's," Philip had echoed his older brother's enthusiasm. They had all scrambled over rocks, and discovered a small patch of white *fynbos* at the end of a long winding path. She remembered comparing it to a bridal bouquet.

"I wonder if I can find my way now to that very same spot of long ago," she thought, "I could email Jon and Philip to tell them about it this afternoon." She walked a little way along a new path. A group of children sat in the long grass on the side, licking ice-creams.

"Where are you going?" a small girl asked her sweetly.

"Have you seen an animal or something?" one of the little boys asked, "Can we come too?"

"Children, we're leaving now," called a lady in a brightly colored sundress with a matching hat, beckoning to them. Anne watched as they ran off.

The path sloped down, ending in a pile of rubble. She stepped over it and down onto a large flat rock, then she jumped off. Two paths led away from her. She chose the one that appeared well worn and took her round a cluster of trees. Was this the way her family had chosen?

Further along, as she shielded her eyes from the bright sunlight, she recognized a very large boulder. "I remember sitting there to rest, and we were drinking our cool drinks," she said to herself. "And the rock stood in the *fynbos*." But in place of the delicate flowers they had seen long ago, the whole area was now covered with thorn bushes and dried out dead grass. As she moved on hesitantly, blackjacks pricked her legs like sharp needles, and clung to her skirt. She drew back wanting to cry "get off of me...off..." as she tried to brush them away. And then in the center of the dried-out thorn patch she saw just a single soft-pink protea standing alone among the weeds. Anne turned quickly and made her way back.



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GENESIS AND GENES

*

David Saks

Most people by now automatically accept unquestioningly the notion that there is an irreconcilable and unbridgeable gulf between 'Religion' and 'Science' (sometimes tellingly replaced by the respective terms 'Faith' and 'Reason'). It is also by now commonly assumed that in the quest for dispassionate, objective and intellectually rigorous answers to the great questions of existence, the Science side of the debate has emerged victorious by a knock-out.

Stereotypically, religious belief is now assumed to have been an essentially regressive, obscurantist phenomenon that for a long time impeded the onward march of scientific discovery. Historically, it has been defined by such events as the confrontation between Galileo and the Inquisition or the Scopes Monkey Trial aimed at suppressing the teaching of evolutionary theory. So deeply-entrenched is this mind-set that proponents of any particular religious belief are by definition considered incapable of mounting a coherent, logical argument in its favor that can stand up to rigorous scientific scrutiny. Conversely, scientists are assumed at all times to conduct their work along scrupulously methodical, logically impeccable and solidly evidence-based lines.

So complete has been the perceived triumph of scientific materialism over anything smacking of theism that today, those attempting to defend the latter even along strict scientific lines are routinely dismissed out of hand. As an example of this, the author of the book under review has elsewhere drawn attention to what Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini wrote in the introduction to their book, *What Darwin Got Wrong* (2010):

This is not a book about God; nor about intelligent design; nor about creationism. Neither of us is into any of those. We thought we'd best make that clear from the outset, because our main contention in what follows will be that there is

something wrong – quite possibly fatally wrong – with the theory of natural selection; and we are aware that, even among those who are not quite sure what it is, allegiance to Darwinism has become a litmus for deciding who does, and who does not, hold a “properly scientific” world view... In fact, we both claim to be outright, card-carrying, signed-up, dyed-in-the-wool, no-holds-barred atheists...

The very fact that scientists admit to having religious beliefs of some kind would seem to be enough to discredit anything they might have to say, as if their basic reasoning must have been somehow twisted and subverted from the outset. Is that the real reason why Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini felt it necessary to pledge upfront their allegiance to atheism?

The converse situation, in which dogmatic, knee-jerk atheism on the part of the scientific establishment can likewise act as a serious retarding force in the advancement of knowledge, is seldom considered. This is beginning to change, with a growing number of scientific scholars distancing themselves from this simplistic dichotomy, but it will evidently be some time before serious inroads are made into what the writer David Klinghoffer has called the “sealed-shut intellectual fortress of the Darwinist worldview”.

In his compelling new book *Genesis and Genes* Yoram Bogacz, a Johannesburg rabbi and educator with a background in chemical engineering, provides a persuasive and erudite challenge to the tendency of uncritically accepting the prevailing scientific thinking of the day as, if one can use such a term, ‘gospel’. As he expresses it at one point, “Many members of the public entertain fantasies of scientists as apolitical creatures, ensconced in their laboratories and isolated from the corrupting effects of power”. Elsewhere, he remarks on how pervasive has become “the caricature of scientists as supermen”. The reality, of course, is that scientists are subject to the same kind of flaws inherent in all human beings, and are heavily influenced both by the context – political, economic, professional or ideological – in which they work and by their own personal

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worldviews. Far from the majority viewpoint always being right, even a basic familiarity with the history of scientific discovery will demonstrate that it has frequently been dead wrong. The greatest scientific breakthroughs have been made not by those who rigidly adhered to the accepted wisdom of the day but by those who had not only the theoretical genius, but just as importantly the tenacity and courage to question it. In this regard, the author quotes the insightful observations of the novelist and science commentator Michael Crichton, who said: "I regard consensus science as an extremely pernicious development that ought to be stopped cold in its tracks. Historically, the claim of consensus has been the first refuge of scoundrels; it is a way to avoid debate by claiming that the matter is already settled. Whenever you hear the consensus of scientists agrees on something or other, reach for your wallet, because you're being had. The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus".

Practitioners of all academic disciplines are prone to being swayed by peer pressure, conformism, 'groupthink' and an inclination to treat holy cows as holy. Science, too, has its fair share of holy cows and taboos. Writes R' Bogacz, "[But] the popular misconception of scientists as courageous researchers who cling tenaciously to anomalous results despite the conflicting consensus of their peers is exactly that – a misconception". The history of science is replete with instances of far-sighted pioneering researchers being ignored, side-lined and even openly ridiculed before their work was finally accepted. The author, amongst other examples, recounts the case of the Australian pathologist Robin Warren, who hypothesized that at least some stomach ulcers were caused by a bacterium, thereby challenging the "standard teaching" that the stomach was sterile and any bacteria one found there were dead. He and his collaborator, Barry Marshall, persisted in their research, despite being labeled as crackpots and treated accordingly by their colleagues. Operating largely independently, they were able to conclusively demonstrate that certain bacteria were able to surmount the acidity of the human stomach and were the cause of most peptic ulcers. For their work, Warren and Marshall were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2005. However, the happy ending to this particular story should not blind us to the fact that the acceptance of their discoveries was delayed by the knee-jerk rejectionism of colleagues dogmatically adhering to standard teachings. R' Bogacz wonders how many scientists over the years have been discouraged from pursuing promising avenues of research for fear of being ridiculed and discredited for going up against the prevailing orthodoxy.

It is important to emphasise that *Genesis and Genes* is by no means intended as an argument for

regarding all scientific discoveries with scepticism. Rather, as Rabbi (Dr.) Dovid Gottlieb points out in the preface, it is an argument for "caution and the careful evaluation of the latest scientific conclusions for their appropriate degree of credibility. In no way does it advocate 'the wholesale rejection of science'". The goal should be "Becoming an Informed Consumer of Science", the title of the opening chapter.

One might ask at this point why it is that a Talmudic scholar, albeit one with a background in engineering, feels it necessary to become involved in this whole debate. The answer, of course, is that in order to challenge scientism, it is crucial to also address the culture of docile conformism and intellectual timidity ("obsequiousness to scientific authority", as R' Gottlieb puts it) within which it has been allowed to flourish. The most compelling arguments conceivable on any topic – and, as even a layperson can see, those posed against fundamental aspects of evolutionary theory are clearly substantial ones – will have no effect whatever if the other side has decided beforehand not to listen to them.

Proceeding along the rigorous lines of enquiry set out in previous chapters, R' Bogacz concludes that the evidence in support of the theory of biological evolution as currently accepted by many (although not all) scientists falls well short of what is required to put it on a truly sound intellectual foundation. He does not state that the theory of evolution is thereby refuted, but (again as expressed by Gottlieb), "rather that the evidence now available does not justify accepting it as true. Indeed, the available evidence justifies profound scepticism".

At the beginning of Chapter Two, entitled "The Bible and Heredity", the author encapsulates an important theme of his book when he writes, "When Torah sources clearly and consistently describe a position about the physical universe, then that is the Torah position, whether one finds it conveniently modern or not". Nor is it incumbent on adherents of Orthodox Judaism to always feel the need to find ways of reconciling their religious tradition with current scientific thinking. The established precepts of the Torah, within which falls the vast realm of the accepted Oral Tradition encapsulated in the Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalistic sources and major commentators, are not subject to change; by contrast, scientific knowledge is, by its very nature, continually subject to change in response to new evidence and discoveries.

Chapter Nine takes the form of a dialogue between the author and 'Jonathan', described as "an avatar for many people with whom the author has corresponded about the subjects covered in this book". In it, the former points out that until 1965, most scientists believed that the universe had never been created, but had existed eternally. At that point, however, the old paradigm was replaced by the Big Bang model which, in demonstrating that the Universe came into

existence at a certain point in time apparently *ex nihilo*, essentially aligned the scientific view with that of the Torah. However, the author asks, this would not have been of any help to someone who had died, for example, in 1950. If that person had been a religious Jew, “he would have lived his entire life with unresolved tension between the scientific paradigm that the universe is eternal, and Jewish belief in the creation of the universe”.

Elsewhere, R’ Bogacz has drawn attention to how belief in an eternal universe was *preferred* by many scientists for ideological/theological reasons. In this regard, he quotes Quantum cosmologist Christopher Isham, who mused, “Perhaps the best argument in favor of the thesis that the Big Bang supports theism is the obvious unease with which it is greeted by some atheist physicists. At times this has led to scientific ideas, such as continuous creation or an oscillating universe, being advanced with a tenacity which so exceeds their intrinsic worth that one can only suspect the operation of psychological forces lying very much deeper than the usual academic desire of a theorist to support his/her theory” (C. Isham, ‘Creation of the Universe as a Quantum Process’ in *Physics, Philosophy and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, Vatican City, Vatican Observatory, 1988, p378.) Similarly, the current Astronomer Royal, Martin Rees, recalls his mentor Dennis Sciama’s dogged commitment to the Steady State Model: “For him, as for its inventors, it had a deep philosophical appeal – the universe existed, from everlasting to everlasting... When conflicting evidence emerged, Sciama therefore sought a loophole... rather as a defense lawyer clutches at any argument to rebut the prosecution case.” (M Rees, *Before the Beginning*, Addison-Wesley, 1997, p41.) Commented the science writer John Gribbin: “The biggest problem with the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe is philosophical – perhaps even theological – what was there before the bang?” (J Gribbin, ‘Oscillating Universe Bounces Back’, *Nature* 259, 1976, p15.)

This leads into an important aspect of *Genesis and Genes*, namely that it does not seek to demonstrate, as a number of other recent works have done, an emerging harmony between Torah and Science. Indeed, the book in many ways is very critical of how this is sometimes done. Immediately after making the previously quoted statement, the author writes: “The belief in the inerrancy of the latest scientific consensus can sometimes manifest itself in a sincere, but misguided, attempt to force traditional sources into the mould of the ruling paradigm”. In Chapter

Seven (‘The Torah and Hominids’), he discusses in detail one example of this, namely the comparatively recent theory put forward by, amongst others, Dr Gerald Schroeder, that the classical Torah sources “support the view that hominids took eons to evolve until, finally, they were infused with a divine soul and made human”. His conclusion, after carefully examining each of the relevant sources, is that such a conclusion is dubious at best. R’ Gottlieb considers this introduction “to the appropriate methodology for investigating Jewish sources for congruence with or contradiction to scientific conclusions” one of the book’s major contributions.

Particularly in Chapters Five and Six (‘Homology, Gills and Embryology’ and ‘The Tree of Life’), the author provides a trenchant summary of some of the challenges being leveled against the orthodox Darwinist line, including even from within that “sealed-shut intellectual fortress” by some of its leading proponents. Naturally, in an area so vast, complex and hotly contested, one should not expect any decisive, ‘slam-dunk’ answers that resolve the whole question once and for all. What these sections should do, though, is provide compelling reasons for adopting a qualified, wait-and-see approach to understanding evolutionary ideas, even – indeed, especially – when certain of its proponents insist that it is all a done deal and there is nothing more to discuss.

R’ Bogacz himself has little doubt that current evolutionary theory is hopelessly flawed and destined, like so many other failed scientific orthodoxies over the centuries, to be transformed radically in the future no matter how much the intellectual establishment tries to keep the genie in the bottle. “What will people say about all this in the future?” asks his imaginary everyman ‘Jonathan’ at the end of the ‘Conversation with Jonathan’ chapter. “They will ask, ‘How could so many people have fallen for this stuff?’” he replies. (The author’s writings on this and related subjects, in addition to this book, can be found on his website, www.TorahExplorer.com).

Genesis and Genes is an impressive work of critical scholarship by one of South African Jewry’s most promising religious thinkers. As a stand-alone history of science alone – and an erudite, consistently readable one – it deserves a wide readership. Primarily, it represents a major and in many ways unique contribution to the growing literature of Torah-and-Science.

Genesis and Genes by Yoram Bogacz, Feldheim Publishers, 2013

JERUSALEM: THE BIOGRAPHY

*

Gary Selikow

Simon Sebag-Montefiore's acclaimed and bestselling history of Jerusalem is an intriguing read, full of interesting lesser known facts, personages and new angles. At times, it reads like a well-paced novel, and is as hard to put down. Certainly, it provides a timely, as well as carefully balanced, account of this extraordinary city's long history, from the earliest times to the present day.

The prologue of this heavy volume begins with the destruction of the Second Temple and genocide of Jerusalem's Jewish population by the Roman legions commanded by Titus. Thereafter, it moves back in time, with the first chapter commencing with the period of Jerusalem's beginnings. The father of the Israelite nation, Abraham, is greeted by the priest-king of Salem Melchizedek, in the name of El-Elyon', the Most High God. This is the city's first mention in the Bible, suggesting Jerusalem was already a Canaanite shrine, ruled by priest-kings.

Next to be recounted is the capture of the town by King David of Israel, who made it his capital. The glorious reign of King Solomon was followed by the disastrous division of his kingdom into the realms of Judah and Israel and the later destruction of the two kingdoms -most catastrophically the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews to Babylon. This was followed by the return of the Jews to their homeland at the behest of the Persian Emperor Cyrus.

An incorrect piece of terminology by the author when speaking of Israel in Biblical times is his referral to it as 'Palestine'. In reality, that term derives from the name imposed by the conquering Roman Empire in the year 135 C.E. in an attempt to obliterate and de-legitimize the Jewish presence in the Holy Land. Before, it was known as Judea, which was the southern kingdom of ancient Israel. The Roman Procurator in charge of the Judean-Israel territories was so angry at the Jews for revolting that he called for his historians and asked them who had been the worst enemies of the Jews in their past history. When told that these had been the Philistines, he accordingly declared that the Land of Israel would thenceforth be called 'Philistia' (further bastardized into 'Palaistina'). From this emerged the name 'Palestine'.

Following on the return from the Babylonian exile is the Hellenic period, the Maccabees and the coming of the Romans, together with the

tyranny and bloody intrigues of the Herodian dynasty. The author has a controversial and interesting view of Jesus and the origins in Israel of Christianity. This is followed by the Jewish Wars against Rome, the destruction by Titus of Jerusalem and exile of Jews from the city.

After the crushing of the Bar Kochba rebellion of 130 CE, Cassius Dio wrote of the Jews that "...very few survived. Fifty of their outposts and 985 villages were razed to the ground and many more [died] by starvation, disease and fire". Roman Emperor Hadrian expunged the name Jerusalem and renamed it Aelia Capitolina. Writes the author, "Seventy-five known Jewish settlements simply vanished. So many Jews were enslaved at the Hebron slave market that they fetched less than a horse. Hadrian not only enforced the ban on circumcision but banned the Jews from even approaching Aelia on pain of death. Jerusalem had vanished. Hadrian wiped Judea off the map..."

Interesting episodes in this digest include the brief return of Jerusalem to the Jews in 614 by Persian Emperor Shabaraz, known as the Royal Boar. Two years later, he expelled the Jews and restored Christian rule.

In the section of the book on Mohammed, it is interesting to note that in persecuting the Jews for refusing to adopt Islam, he then changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. This has two very pertinent implications. By rejecting Jerusalem, Mohammed was ironically confirming Jerusalem's Jewish essence, and one further cannot make the claim that Jerusalem is as central to Islam as it is to Judaism. This relates to a quibble this reviewer has with Montefiore regarding the book. Montefiore espouses the thesis that Jerusalem belongs equally to Jews, Christians and Muslims. However, it is self-evident in the history covered here that Mohammed rejected Jerusalem and made Mecca the main center of Islam.

Jerusalem was later conquered by invading Arabs and absorbed into their empire. In the section on the Mamluks, the next Muslim occupiers of the city, there is a discussion on the great Torah scholar Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (the Ramban), who believed that the Jews should not merely mourn Jerusalem, but return, settle and rebuild it before the coming of the Messiah. In other words, the Ramban was a pioneer of religious Zionism, and Zionism itself is a movement that has existed and developed since the Roman exile.

The reader can discover more in this volume about the Islamic persecution of Jews in Jerusalem

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and the Levant. It is simply a self-serving pro-Islamic myth that Jews were well treated under Muslim rule. In this period, Jews in Jerusalem were prohibited from wearing white on their Sabbath or Muslim headgear or to wear nails in their shoes. Christians lived under similar ordinances. Both had to make way for Muslims in the streets. Oppressive fees were enforced with cruel violence. Montefiore writes, "When a stray dog wandered onto the Temple Mount, the *qadi* ordered the killing of every canine in Jerusalem. As a special humiliation, every Jew and Christian had to deliver a dead dog to a collection point outside the Zion Gate. Gangs of children killed dogs and then gave their carcasses to the nearest infidel". The Jews were extorted and robbed and many left the city for this reason.

Later, we read of how the Polish Ashkenazis were finally broken in 1720 through imprisonment, banishment and bankruptcy. The synagogue was burned down, and became known as the Ruin - the Hurva Synagogue. It remained a wreck for over a hundred years before being reconstructed in the 19th Century, but was destroyed once more by the Jordanians in 1967.

In the 19th Century, the plight of the Jews under Ottoman rule worsened. After a visit to Jerusalem, Karl Marx wrote in the *New York Daily Tribune* in April 1854, "None equals the misery and suffering of the Jews of Jerusalem, inhabiting the most filthy quarter, constant objects of Musulman oppression and intolerance, insulted by the Greeks, persecuted by the Latins". The British vice-consul James Finn reported that a Jew who walked past the gate leading to the Holy Sepulcher was beaten because it was illegal for a Jew to pass it. Another was stabbed by an Ottoman soldier and a Jewish funeral was attacked by Arabs.

The idea of Jews anywhere in the Middle East being a sovereign people in an independent state, not subjugated to Muslim rule and humiliated under *Dhimni* status, is what was intolerable to the Arabs. This is at the root of the violent Arab rejection of the state of Israel, and before that of the migration of Jews into the territory.

The first real challenge in centuries to Muslim dominance was posed by Napoleon Bonaparte, who in 1799 entered Palestine from Egypt, conquered Jaffa and laid siege to Acre. On 20 April, at Ramle, 25 miles from Jerusalem, he issued a call for the restoration of Jewish rule in their ancient homeland, the Jews being the rightful heirs.

There are interesting chapters on the nascent restoration of Zionism in the 19th Century, when

there was already a considerable Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, and a Jewish majority in Jerusalem from 1860. Particularly compelling are the chapters on the British Mandate period, featuring the pogroms carried out by Arabs against Jerusalem's Jews at the instigation of the Mufti Amin el Husseini in 1920 and 1929 and the Nazi-backed 1936 Arab Revolt. In 1936 the mufti called the German consul in Jerusalem to pledge his support for Nazism and his desire to co-operate with that regime.

The closing chapters discuss Jerusalem during World War II, when the Jewish community of pre-State Israel was threatened with a Nazi invasion, given German advances in Egypt under Rommel and Nazi penetration of the Soviet Union into the Caucasus. This is followed by the 'Dirty War' by the British colonial forces and Jews of the Palestine Mandate, the War of Independence, the first twenty years of the restored State of Israel and finally the unification of Israel after the Six Day War.

The Epilogue discusses the conflict until today and the author's views on it. Here, Montefiore saliently points out: "It is often forgotten that all the suburbs outside the Jerusalem walls were new settlements built between 1860 and 1948, by Arabs as well as Jews and Europeans. The Arab areas such as Sheik Jarrah are no older than the Jewish ones and no more or less legitimate". Given this, it is difficult to understand why he should then oppose the growth of Jewish communities in East Jerusalem and Judea after 1967 on the grounds that they are an 'obstacle to peace'. In the view of this writer, it cannot be illegitimate for Jews to build anywhere in the City of David or Judea. In some of his conclusions, the author seemingly aims to please everybody. However, he does pertinently point out the absurdity of the claims by the PLO, Palestinian Authority and Hamas et al that the Jewish Temple never existed in Jerusalem, something that is easily disproved by the architectural, archaeological and written historical record. The denial of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem and Israel should be regarded as being just as offensive to the Jewish people as denial of the Holocaust, and no less dangerous. The same is true of the wicked claim that the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland somehow constituted an act of 'colonialism'.

Jerusalem: The Biography by Simon Sebag Montefiore, Alfred A. Knopf, 2011, Illustrated. 650 pp.

EICHMANN'S MEN

*

Ralph Zulman

More than sixty years after the advent of the National Socialist genocides, the question still remains: How could a state-sponsored terror that took the lives of millions of men, women and children happen? *Eichmann's Men*, Hans Safrian's path-breaking work on Adolf Eichmann and his Nazi helpers, attempts to provide the answer. The book examines a central group of National Socialist perpetrators who expelled German, Austrian, Polish, Russian, French, Greek, Italian, and Czech Jews from their homelands and deported massive numbers of them to ghettos, concentration camps and killing centers of occupied Eastern Europe. Safrian reconstructs the 'careers' of Eichmann and these men in the implementing the Nazi regime's racial policies, from the gradual marginization of their victims through the escalation to boycotts and segregation, to deportation and forced labor, and finally, to mass murder.

Dr Safrian received his PhD in history from the University of Vienna in Austria and his Master's degree in history and German literature from the Free University in Berlin. He lectures in history at the *Institute für Zeitgeschichte* at the University of Vienna. He was also a Paul Resnick Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Research Team Leader for the Independent Commission of Experts - Second World War, and a research historian for the Historical Commission of the Republic of Austria. He is the author of numerous works on World War II and Nazi war crimes. In November 2011, he visited South Africa and delivered the *Kristallnacht* Commemoration Lecture at the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg. The book is dedicated to his grandfather Otto Haas, born in 1897 in Breclav, Moravia, and probably murdered in 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau after being deported from Paris. It is also in memory of Raul Hilberg, the foremost Holocaust historian whom, Safrian writes, "taught me to ask the right questions".

Professor Deborah Lipstadt of Emory University makes the trenchant point that Safrian provides readers "with excellent insight into how Adolf Eichmann and a small group of men around him were able to coordinate and manage a major portion of the Final Solution. He demonstrates that the desk murderers, rather than simply

shuffling papers, played a tremendously important role in coordinating and carrying out the murder of millions of European Jews. They were creative, pro-active, energetic, and completely devoted to their work".

David Cesarani, a Research Professor in History at the University of London, describes the book as "a break-through in the study of Eichmann, his office and the men who implemented anti-Jewish policy in the Third Reich - culminating in the grotesquely efficient management of genocide. It is the standard work on the subject. It deserves to become a classic".

George C. Bowder of Holocaust and Genocide Studies regards the book as a major contribution to our understanding of the evolution of perpetrator mentality. He writes, "With Safrian's fine biographical sketches of these men and descriptions of their behavior ... a convincing picture of their character and motivation emerges ... The view [then] broadens well beyond the Eichmann men to their collaboration in the Wehrmacht occupation administrators, Nazi allied governments and indigenous populations".

The book makes reference to Captain SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Alois Brunner, one of Eichmann's men. Despite brutal manhunts in Paris, Nice and other French cities, Brunner was unable to meet the quotas set in Berlin. The book ends with the question whether Brunner had any pangs of conscience regarding his more than active contribution to the National Socialist genocide. According to the *Chicago Sun Times*, his answer was quite the contrary. The Jews, he said, deserved to die because they were "agents of the devil, human scum. I regret nothing and would do it all over again".

Eichmann's Men by Hans Safrian, translated from the German by Ute Stargardt, Cambridge University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010, 328pp.

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THE TRAVELLING RABBI: MY AFRICAN TRIBE

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Cedric Ginsberg

The South African Jewish Community is unique among the communities in the Jewish world – and nowhere is this more evident than in the pages of this book. It is a relatively young community. It was only from the time of the 1820 Settlers in the Cape Colony that a form of sustainable Jewish life came to be established. Under the rule of the Dutch East India Company – all servants of the Company who were also residents, had, at least nominally, to be Christian. Individual cases of conversion of Jews during the period of Dutch sovereignty are recorded. The Napoleonic Wars precipitated the first British Occupation in 1795. In 1815 Britain legally acquired the Cape Colony by a treaty signed with the Netherlands¹. The first recorded Jewish service took place in Cape Town in 1841, and the first synagogue was built in the Gardens in 1863. The original building still stands next to the present Gardens Shul and serves as the entrance to the Cape Town Jewish Museum. Most of the Jewish immigrants until the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand hailed from England and Western Europe. It was only from the 1880's that Eastern European Jews mainly from Lithuania, White Russia (Belarus), Latvia and Northern Poland began to arrive in numbers. The earlier arrivals were responsible for setting up many of the formal structures of communal life, particularly in the cities, but it was the Eastern European Jews who introduced its *neshome*, its soul.

Many of the early arrivals eked out a living as *smouses* – itinerant pedlars. Later, they would perhaps open a store in a town along their peddling route. Over the years, most of the general dealer stores (*algemene handelaars*) were owned by Jews – spread out in many of the small towns around what would become the Union of South Africa in 1910. Hyman Polski, an early South African Yiddish writer, was also the editor of the *Afrikaner Yidishe Tsaytung* published weekly in Johannesburg. He published a slim volume of short stories in Yiddish in the late 1930s. The opening story in this volume, called *In Afrike*, was *Der 'Trayer'*. This story epitomised the lot of many early immigrant arrivals from Eastern Europe. The word 'trayer' (טרייער) entered into

the South African Yiddish lexicon to mean to 'try' and make a living this way or that – until they found something that suited them. So the *smousing* trail often turned into a shop in a small town. Over the years many Jews settled in small towns along the length and breadth of South Africa, running stores and many of the hotels. The stores frequently catered to the surrounding farming communities. This status quo probably endured until after World War II. From this time South Africa enjoyed a period of economic growth. From the early 1950s a slow migration of Jews began from the smaller towns towards the larger towns and cities. The younger generation tended to opt for the professions and frequently left to settle in larger urban areas where they saw greater opportunities. The trend accelerated in the 1960s and from the 1970s was accompanied by an increasing trend of immigration to Israel, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. As time went on the country communities shrank and the urban ones increased.

It was the late Dr Jocelyn Hellig who, in a 1984 book on the community edited by Marcus Arkin, referred to the nature of Jewish religious expression in South Africa as "non-observant orthodox".² This means that although many South African Jews may not be fully observant in the orthodox mould, large numbers affiliate to orthodox synagogues. Many may drive to synagogue on Friday night or on Yom tov – but it is to an orthodox shul that they do so. This is a unique phenomenon in the Jewish world. The community may have become more generally observant since the publication of Arkin's book. However, this phenomenon persists and I believe that it is due the earlier spread of the community over so many *platteland* communities around the country. As people moved to the larger centres, they maintained the custom of driving into the town in order to attend services – even if it were Shabbat. It gradually became an accepted practice even though it was highly frowned upon by the Rabbinate.

The SA Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth Project has, up to the present, published five volumes entitled *Jewish Life: In the South African Country Communities*, covering present day Limpopo Province, Western Cape and the Great Karoo, the Southern and Eastern Cape and the former Transkei, Kwazulu-Natal and the Free State. These volumes record an enormous amount of information relevant to the establishment and early years of many country communities. The project has identified well over 1500 places around

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the country where there has been a Jewish presence.

What Rabbi Silberhaft has done in his new book *The Travelling Rabbi: My African Tribe* (co-written with well-known editor and journalist Suzanne Belling, who serves on the editorial board of this journal) is, among other things, to record the demise of many of these communities. He has referred to how they flourished in their heyday. In a very compassionate way, he has frequently been the person who has overseen their shutting down. Synagogues do not have any innate holiness: once the Torahs (*Torot*) have been removed and the building deconsecrated, it can be used for any other purpose. In many cases the Rabbi saw to it that the furniture – the *Aron Kodesh*, *Bimah*, pews – were ‘recycled’ and installed in another operating shul, often in Israel. In this way, suitably recorded by means of a wall plaque, a part of the old shul lives on, in new surroundings. The cemeteries of defunct communities are unfortunately particularly vulnerable. It was saddening to read again and again of the vandalising of these cemeteries (for example Lichtenburg and Ermelo). The solution seems to have been found in the laying of tombstones flat on a bed of concrete, in order to minimise future damage.

The country communities have, in most cases, been depleted to the extent that only a few individuals remain in a town. The Rabbi keeps in touch with these people and from time to time organises a regional get-together, so that people from neighbouring towns have contact with one another. He brings kosher food and enables these isolated individuals to experience some Jewish conviviality. This assists in maintaining the links of identification within the community. One of the problems of living in isolation, particularly where an individual has married out, is that there may be increasing estrangement from tradition. An issue which the Rabbi unfortunately confronts repeatedly is cremation. Jewish tradition does not permit cremation – and particularly in the post-Holocaust era, this practice seems all the more abhorrent. He has often been successful in averting a cremation from taking place.

Community Rabbis usually take care of the spiritual needs of a single community in one suburb within one city. Rabbi Silberhaft's community is the whole of sub-Saharan Africa as well as Mauritius – a huge area. I believe that as community Rabbi, he serves the largest community in the world! He is also a very active member of the African Jewish Congress. This organisation takes care of matters of Jewish interest in this region outside the borders of South Africa.

This book is well-written and easy and interesting to read. It is also a very important book. Together with the Beth Hatefutsoth Project, it constitutes a record of Jewish settlements around South Africa. The Beth Hatefutsoth volumes

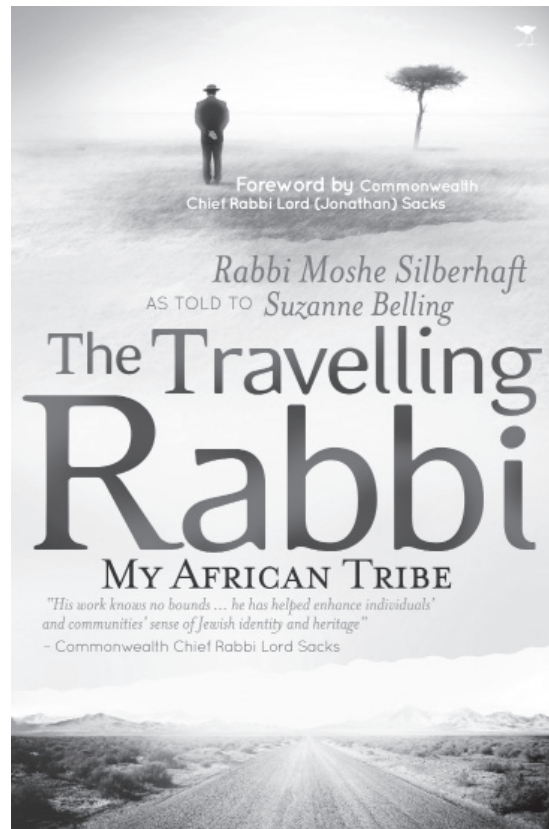
chronicle their beginnings and the peak of their existence. This book tells of those Jewish communities which have survived into the 21st Century – how they continue to exist or how they have been closed down. I believe that the book should have had an index. It would then have been easy to find a reference to any town or personality within that town. The book is both a personal memoir as well as an historical record of the fate of many country communities. As such I believe it demands an index in addition to the glossary.

I was disappointed to find an inaccuracy or two in the book. On page 16 there is a reference to *Kristallnacht* as having occurred in 1936. In fact that “pogrom” occurred in Germany, Austria and areas in Europe controlled by Nazi Germany, on 9-10 November 1938. There are references on pages 125 and 133 to Louis Herrman's important book on the early history of Jewish South Africa. Herrman's name is spelt “Herman”. That said, I highly recommend this charming book as an enjoyable read and an important addition to our knowledge of the South African Jewish community.

The Travelling Rabbi: My African Tribe by Moshe Silberhaft, with Suzanne Belling, Jacana Media, 2012, 416pp.

Notes

- 1 T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*. Cape Town: Southern Book Publishers, 1988, pp. 42-43.
- 2 Jocelyn Hellig, “Religious expression”, in *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*. (edited by Marcus Arkin). Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 102 ff.



new POETRY

The Rabbi

After the service I introduce myself.
The Rabbi eyes my faded jeans
(grief holds no truck with what to wear).
I know who you are he says
and walks away.

Judith Donner Hancock

December Holiday

Clouds that fretted
Through the night.
Now tattered and frayed.
The veld is wet.

On the highway
Cars stream by.
Their glass windows
Reflect, glint and glean.
People going on holiday.

At the curbside
Whisks and split husks
Of tall grass
Sway in the wind.

Plover chicks appear
Scratch search and run.
Scattered daisy heads
Turn their petals
To the morning sun.

Ben Krengel

The Season

The lawn's a frigid jigsaw puzzle
of frozen brown grass.
Shut in for winter,
I sip your best scotch.
Your car is listed for sale
in the auto shopper.
There's no tree this year,
no lights around the windows.
I hear the nurse in your bedroom
asking if you need another shot.
I grab the remote
and turn off your tv.
The next time I turn it on
it will be mine.

John Yarbrough

Shock Waves

The end came softly
Not with bashing and banging
And screaming
No raucous manifestation
Of rocks unearthed
Or imploding demolition
Of the structures
That stood there before

It came with the realization
That patterns were riveted into place
It came with the knowledge
That there would be no change
It came by bolting the door
Against a barrage of abuse
Barring it from entry

The Tsunami broke the coastline to bits
Early on a summer morning
The wave had travelled for miles and miles
Surely, surreptitiously, silently
Gaining momentum
For the devastating destruction
Of its ultimate destination

With futile finality
In the ravaged quiet
After it left
The end came

Charlotte Cohen

AMSTERDAM'S JEWISH QUARTER

*

The Jewish Quarter of Amsterdam is located in the very heart of Holland's capital. Since the early seventeenth century until the start of World War II, it was one of the world's major centres of Jewish life and culture. In 1940, more than 10% of Amsterdam's residents were Jews. Their influence on Dutch society was considerable. Until today, the Dutch call their capital '*Mokum*' - Hebrew for 'place'.

Even though Jews were socially, economically and professionally restricted, they enjoyed a considerable degree of religious freedom. This enabled them to build the imposing Portuguese synagogue in 1675. It still stands there in its authentic state. In November 2011, Queen Beatrix reinaugurated the compound after two years of renovation. Today, it is possible to see the Ets Haim Jewish Library and to visit the underground treasure chambers. Here can be viewed a collection of unique Jewish objects. These surprisingly



survived the war, although some of them had been confiscated by the Nazis and taken to the Institute for Study of the Jewish Question in Frankfurt, Germany. Guided tours in English are operated by Jewish Amsterdam Tour (*Text by Naomi Koopman*)



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